

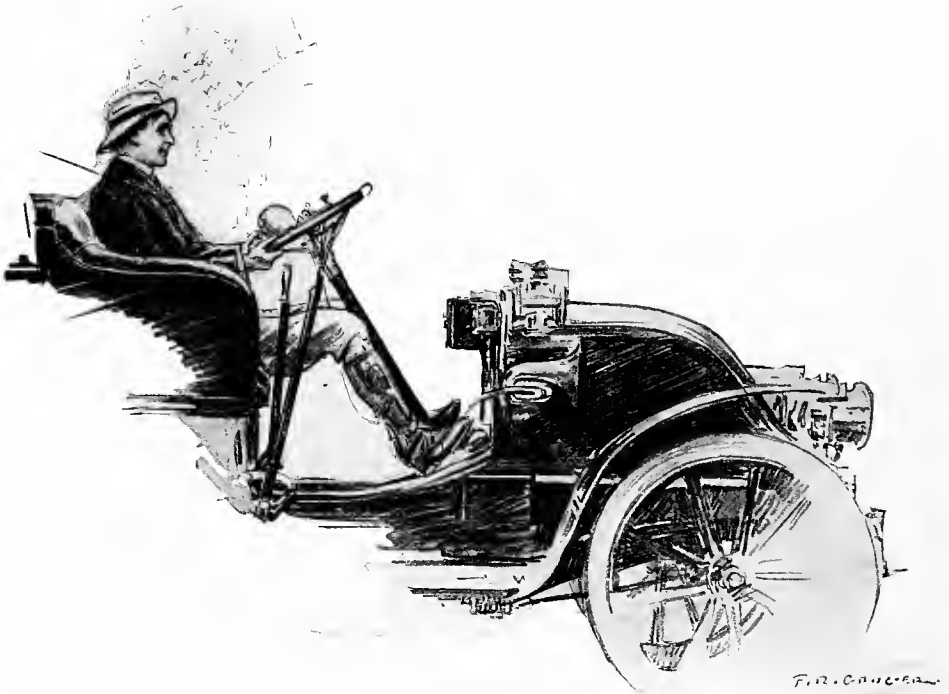
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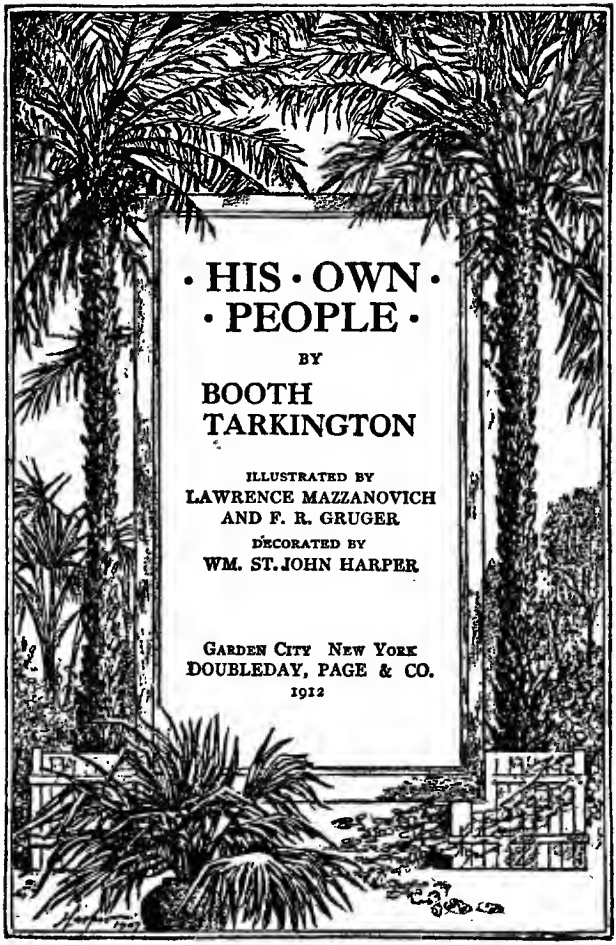
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·HIS·OWN·PEOPLE·



"Inheritor of all that had belonged to the late great Cooley"



· HIS · OWN · · PEOPLE ·

BY

BOOTH TARKINGTON

ILLUSTRATED BY
LAWRENCE MAZZANOVICH
AND F. R. GRUGER

DECORATED BY
WM. ST. JOHN HARPER

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.
1912

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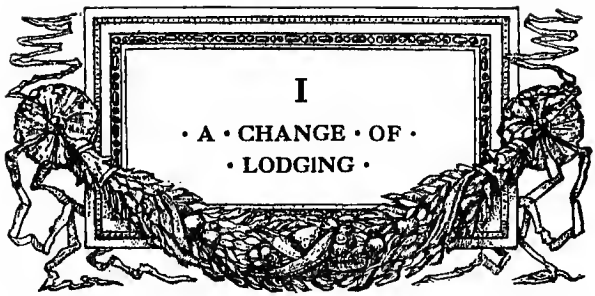
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·HIS·OWN·PEOPLE·



THE glass-domed "palm-room" of the Grand Continental Hotel Magnifique in Rome is of vasty heights and distances, filled with a mellow green light which filters down languidly through the upper foliage of tall palms, so that the two hundred people who may be refreshing or displaying themselves there at the tea-hour have something the look of under-water creatures playing upon the sea-bed. They appear, however, to be unaware of their condition; even the ladies, most like

anemones of that gay assembly, do not seem to know it; and when the Hungarian band (crustacean-like in costume, and therefore well within the picture) has sheathed its flying tentacles and withdrawn by dim processes, the tea-drinkers all float out through the doors, instead of bubbling up and away through the filmy roof. In truth, some such exit as that was imagined for them by a young man who remained in the aquarium after they had all gone, late one afternoon of last winter. They had been marvelous enough, and to him could have seemed little more so had they made such a departure. He could almost have gone that way himself, so charged was he with the uplift of his belief that, in spite of the brilliant

strangeness of the hour just past, he had been no fish out of water.

While the waiters were clearing the little tables, he leaned back in his chair in a content so rich it was nearer ecstasy. He could not bear to disturb the possession joy had taken of him, and, like a half-awake boy clinging to a dream that his hitherto unkind sweetheart has kissed him, lingered on in the enchanted atmosphere, his eyes still full of all they had beheld with such delight, detaining and smiling upon each revelation of this fresh memory—the flashingly lovely faces, the dreamily lovely faces, the pearls and laces of the anemone ladies, the color and romantic fashion of the uniforms, and the old princes who had been pointed out to him: splendid old

men wearing white mustaches and single eye-glasses, as he had so long hoped and dreamed they did.

"Mine own people!" he whispered. "I have come unto mine own at last. Mine own people!" After long waiting (he told himself), he had seen them—the people he had wanted to see, wanted to know, wanted to be *of!* Ever since he had begun to read of the "beau monde" in his schooldays, he had yearned to know some such sumptuous reality as that which had come true to-day, when, at last, in Rome he had seen—as he wrote home that night—"the finest essence of Old-World society mingling in Cosmopolis."

Artificial odors (too heavy to keep up with the crowd that had worn them)

still hung about him; he breathed them deeply, his eyes half-closed and his lips noiselessly formed themselves to a quotation from one of his own poems:

While trails of scent, like cobweb's films
  Slender and faint and rare,
Of roses, and rich, fair fabrics,
  Cling on the stirless air,
The sibilance of voices,
  At a wave of Milady's glove,
Is stilled ——

He stopped short, interrupting himself with a half-cough of laughter as he remembered the inspiration of these verses. He had written them three months ago, at home in Cranston, Ohio, the evening after Anna McCord's "coming-out tea." "Milady" meant Mrs. McCord; she had "stilled" the conversa-

tion of her guests when Mary Kramer (whom the poem called a "sweet, pale singer") rose to sing Mavourneen; and the stanza closed with the right word to rhyme with "glove." He felt a contemptuous pity for his little, untraveled, provincial self of three months ago, if, indeed, it could have been himself who wrote verses about Anna McCord's "coming-out tea" and referred to poor, good old Mrs. McCord as "Milady"!

The second stanza had intimated a conviction of a kind which only poets may reveal:

She sang to that great assembly,
  They thought, as they praised her tone;
But she and my heart knew better:
  Her song was for me alone.

He had told the truth when he wrote of Mary Kramer as pale and sweet, and she was paler, but no less sweet, when he came to say good-by to her before he sailed. Her face, as it was at the final moment of the protracted farewell, shone before him very clearly now for a moment: young, plaintive, white, too lamentably honest to conceal how much her "God-speed" to him cost her. He came very near telling her how fond of her he had always been; came near giving up his great trip to remain with her always.

"Ah!" He shivered as one shivers at the thought of disaster narrowly averted. "The fates were good that I only came near it!"

He took from his breast-pocket an en-

graved card, without having to search for it, because during the few days the card had been in his possession the action had become a habit.

"Comtesse de Vaurigard," was the name engraved, and below was written in pencil: "To remember Monsieur Robert Russ Mellin he promise to come to tea Hotel Magnifique, Roma, at five o'clock Thursday."

THERE had been disappointment in the first stages of his journey, and that had gone hard with Mellin. Europe had been his goal so long, and his hopes of pleasure grew so high when (after his years of saving and putting by, bit by bit, out of his salary in a real-estate office) he drew actually near the shining

horizon. But London, his first stopping-place, had given him some dreadful days. He knew nobody, and had not understood how heavily sheer loneliness —which was something he had never felt until then—would weigh upon his spirits. In Cranston, where the young people "grew up together," and where he met a dozen friends on the street in a half-hour's walk, he often said that he "liked to be alone with himself." London, after his first excitement in merely being there, taught him his mistake, chilled him with weeks of forbidding weather, puzzled and troubled him.

He was on his way to Paris when (as he recorded in his journal) a light came into his life. This illumination first

shone for him by means of one Cooley, son and inheritor of all that had belonged to the late great Cooley, of Cooley Mills, Connecticut. Young Cooley, a person of cheery manners and bright waistcoats, was one of Mellin's few sea-acquaintances; they had played shuffle-board together on the steamer during odd half-hours when Mr. Cooley found it possible to absent himself from poker in the smoking-room; and they encountered each other again on the channel boat crossing to Calais.

"*Hey!*" was Mr. Cooley's lively greeting. "I 'm meetin' lots of people I know, to-day. You runnin' over to Paris, too? Come up to the boat-deck and meet the Countess de Vaurigard."

"Who?" said Mellin, red with pleas-

ure, yet fearing that he did not hear aright.

"The Countess de Vaurigard. Queen! met her in London. Sneyd introduced me to her. You remember Sneyd on the steamer? Baldish Englishman —red nose—does n't talk much—younger brother of Lord Rugden, so he says. Played poker some. Well, *yes!*"

"I saw him. I did n't meet him."

"You did n't miss a whole lot. Fact is, before we landed I almost had him sized up for queer, but when he introduced me to the Countess I saw my mistake. He must be the real thing. *She* certainly is! You come along up and see."

So Mellin followed, to make his bow

before a thin, dark, charmingly pretty young woman, who smiled up at him from her deck-chair through an enhancing mystery of veils; and presently he found himself sitting beside her. He could not help trembling slightly at first, but he would have given a great deal if, by some miraculous vision, Mary Kramer and other friends of his in Cranston could have seen him engaged in what he thought of as "conversational badinage" with the Comtesse de Vaurigard.

Both the lady and her name thrilled him. He thought he remembered the latter in Froissart: it conjured up "baronial halls" and "donjon keeps," rang resonantly in his mind like "Let the portcullis fall!" At home he had been

wont to speak of the "oldest families in Cranston," complaining of the invasions of "new people" into the social territory of the McCords and Mellins and Kramers—a pleasant conception which the presence of a De Vaurigard revealed to him as a petty and shameful fiction; and yet his humility, like his little fit of trembling, was of short duration, for the gay geniality of Madame de Vaurigard put him amazingly at ease.

At Calais young Cooley (with a matter-of-course air, and not seeming to feel the need of asking permission) accompanied her to a compartment, and Mellin walked with them to the steps of the coach, where he paused, murmuring some words of farewell.

Madame de Vaurigard turned to him with a prettily assumed dismay.

"What! You stay at Calais?" she cried, pausing with one foot on the step to ascend. "Oh! I am sorry for you. Calais is ter-rible!"

"No. I am going on to Paris."

"So? You have frien's in another coach which you wish to be wiz?"

"No, no, indeed," he stammered hastily.

"Well, my frien'," she laughed gayly, "w'y don' you come wiz us?"

Blushing, he followed Cooley into the coach, to spend five happy hours, utterly oblivious of the bright French landscape whirling by outside the window.

There ensued a month of conscien-

tious sightseeing in Paris, and that unfriendly city afforded him only one glimpse of the Countess. She whizzed by him in a big touring-car one afternoon as he stood on an "isle of safety" at the foot of the Champs Elysées. Cooley was driving the car. The raffish, elderly Englishman (whose name, Mellin knew, was Sneyd) sat with him, and beside Madame de Vaurigard in the tonneau lolled a gross-looking man—unmistakably an American—with a jovial, red, smooth-shaven face and several chins. Brief as the glimpse was, Mellin had time to receive a distinctly disagreeable impression of this person, and to wonder how Heaven could vouchsafe the society of Madame de Vaurigard to so coarse a creature.

All the party were dressed as for the road, gray with dust, and to all appearances in a merry mood. Mellin's heart gave a leap when he saw that the Countess recognized him. Her eyes, shining under a white veil, met his for just the instant before she was quite by, and when the machine had passed a little handkerchief waved for a moment from the side of the tonneau where she sat.

With that he drew the full breath of Romance.

He had always liked to believe that "*grandes dames*" leaned back in the luxurious upholstery of their victorias, landaulettes, daumonts or automobiles with an air of inexpressible though languid hauteur. The Newport letter in the Cranston Telegraph often referred

to it. But the gayety of that greeting from the Countess' little handkerchief was infinitely refreshing, and Mellin decided that animation was more becoming than hauteur—even to a "*grande dame*."

That night he wrote (almost without effort) the verses published in the Cranston Telegraph two weeks later. They began:

Marquise, ma belle, with your kerchief of lace
Awave from your flying car,
And your slender hand—

The hand to which he referred was the same which had arrested his gondola and his heart simultaneously, five days ago, in Venice. He was on his way to

the station when Madame de Vaurigard's gondola shot out into the Grand Canal from a narrow channel, and at her signal both boats paused.

"Ah! but you fly away!" she cried, lifting her eyebrows mournfully, as she saw the steamer-trunk in his gondola. "You are goin' return to America?"

"No. I 'm just leaving for Rome."

"Well, in three day' *I* am goin' to Rome!" She clapped her hands lightly and laughed. "You know this is three time' we meet jus' by chance, though that second time it was so quick—*pff!* like that—we did n't talk much togezzer! Monsieur Mellin," she laughed again, "I think we mus' be frien's. Three time'—an' we are both goin' to

Rome! Monsieur Mellin, you believe in *Fate?*"

With a beating heart he did.

Thence came the invitation to meet her at the Magnifique for tea, and the card she scribbled for him with a silver pencil. She gave it with the prettiest gesture, leaning from her gondola to his as they parted. She turned again, as the water between them widened, and with her "*Au revoir*" offered him a faintly wistful smile to remember.

All the way to Rome the noises of the train beat out the measure of his Parisian verses:

Marquise, ma belle, with your kerchief of lace
Awave from your flying car—

He came out of his reverie with a start. A dozen men and women, dressed for dinner, with a gold-fish officer or two among them, swam leisurely through the aquarium on their way to the hotel restaurant. They were the same kind of people who had sat at the little tables for tea—people of the great world, thought Mellin: no vulgar tourists or "trippers" among them; and he shuddered at the remembrance of his *pension* (whither it was time to return) and its conscientious students of Baedeker, its dingy halls and permanent smell of cold food. Suddenly a high resolve lit his face: he got his coat and hat from the brass-and-blue custodian in the lobby, and without hesitation entered the "bureau."

"I 'm not quite satisfied where I am staying—where I 'm stopping, that is," he said to the clerk. "I think I 'll take a room here."

"Very well, sir. Where shall I send for your luggage?"

"I shall bring it myself," replied Mellin coldly, "in my cab."

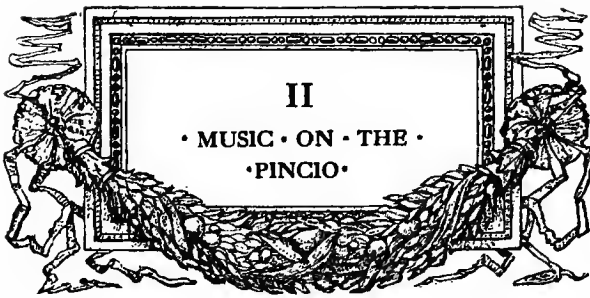
He did not think it necessary to reveal the fact that he was staying at one of the cheaper *pensions;* and it may be mentioned that this reticence (as well as the somewhat chilling, yet careless, manner of a gentleman of the "great world" which he assumed when he returned with his trunk and bag) very substantially increased the rate put upon the room he selected at the Magnifique. However, it was with great satisfaction

that he found himself installed in the hotel, and he was too recklessly exhilarated, by doing what he called the "right thing," to waste any time wondering what the "right thing" would do to the diminishing pad of express checks he carried in the inside pocket of his waistcoat.

"Better live a fortnight like a gentleman," he said, as he tossed his shoes into a buhl cabinet, "than vegetate like a tourist for a year."

He had made his entrance into the "great world" and he meant to hold his place in it as one "to the manor born." Its people should not find him lacking: he would wear their manner and speak their language—no *gaucherie* should betray him, no homely phrase escape his lips.

This was the chance he had always hoped for, and when he fell asleep in his gorgeous, canopied bed, his soul was uplifted with happy expectations.



THE following afternoon found him still in that enviable condition as he stood listening to the music on the Pincian Hill. He had it of rumor that the Fashion of Rome usually took a turn there before it went to tea, and he had it from the lady herself that Madame de Vaurigard would be there. Presently she came, reclining in a victoria, the harness of her horses flashing with gold in the sunshine. She wore a long ermine stole; her hat was ermine; she carried a muff of the same

fur, and Mellin thought it a perfect finish to the picture that a dark gentleman of an appearance most distinguished should be sitting beside her. An Italian noble, surely!

She saw the American at once, nodded to him and waved her hand. The victoria went on a little way beyond the turn of the drive, drew out of the line of carriages, and stopped.

"Ah, Monsieur Mellin," she cried, as he came up, "I am glad! I was so foolish yesterday I did n' give you the address of my little apartment an' I forgot to ask you what is your hotel. I tol' you I would come here for my drive, but still I might have lost you for ever. See what many people! It is jus' that Fate again."

She laughed, and looked to the Italian

for sympathy in her kindly merriment. He smiled cordially upon her, then lifted his hat and smiled as cordially upon Mellin.

"I am so happy to fin' myself in Rome that I forget"—Madame de Vaurigard went on—"*ever'sing!* But now I mus' make sure not to lose you. What is your hotel?"

"Oh, the Magnifique," Mellin answered carelessly. "I suppose everybody that one knows stops there. One does stop there, when one is in Rome, does n't one?"

"Everybody go' there for tea, and to eat, sometime, but to *stay*—ah, that is for the American!" she laughed. "That is for you who are all so abomin-*ab*-ly rich!" She smiled to the Italian again,

and both of them smiled beamingly on Mellin.

"But that is n't always our fault, is it?" said Mellin easily.

"Aha! You mean you are of the new generation, of the yo'ng American' who come over here an' try to spen' these immense fortune'—those '*pile*'—your father or your gran'father make! I know quite well. Ah?"

"Well," he hesitated, smiling, "I suppose it does look a little by way of being like that."

"Wicked fellow!" She leaned forward and tapped his shoulder chidingly with two fingers. "I know what you wish the mos' in the worl'—you wish to get into mischief. That is it! No, sir, I will jus' take you in han'!"

"When will you take me?" he asked boldly.

At this, the pleasant murmur of laughter—half actual and half suggested—with which she underlined the conversation, became loud and clear, as she allowed her vivacious glance to strike straight into his upturned eyes, and answered:

"As long as a little turn roun' the hill, *now*. Cavaliere Corni——"

To Mellin's surprise and delight the Italian immediately descended from the victoria without the slightest appearance of irritation; on the contrary, he was urbane to a fine degree, and, upon Madame de Vaurigard's formally introducing him to Mellin, saluted the latter with grave politeness, expressing in good

English a hope that they might meet often. When the American was installed at the Countess' side she spoke to the driver in Italian, and they began to move slowly along the ilex avenue, the coachman reining his horses to a walk.

"You speak Italian?" she inquired.

"Oh, not a great deal more than a smattering," he replied airily—a truthful answer, inasmuch as a vocabulary consisting simply of "*quanty costy*" and "*troppo*" cannot be seriously considered much more than a smattering. Fortunately she made no test of his linguistic attainment, but returned to her former subject.

"Ah, yes, all the worl' to-day know' the new class of American," she said—

"*your* class. Many year' ago we have another class which Europe did n' like. That was when the American was ter-ri-ble! He was the—what is that you call? —oh, yes; he 'make himself,' you say: that is it. My frien', he was abomin-*able!* He brag'; he talk' through the nose; yes, and he was niggardly, rich as he was! But you, you yo'ng men of the new generation, you are gentlemen of the idleness; you are aristocrats, with polish an' with culture. An' yet you throw your money away—yes, you throw it to poor Europe as if to a beggar!"

"No, no," he protested with an indulgent laugh which confessed that the truth was really "Yes, yes."

"Your smile betray' you!" she cried

triumphantly. "More than jus' bein' guilty of that fault, I am goin' to tell you of others. You are not the ole-time —what is it you say?—Ah, yes, the 'goody-goody.' I have heard my great American frien', Honor-able Chanlair Pedlow, call it the Sonday-school. Is it not? Yes, you are not the Sonday-school yo'ng men, you an' your class!"

"No," he said, bestowing a long glance upon a stout nurse who was sitting on a bench near the drive and attending to twins in a perambulator. "No, we 're not exactly dissenting parsons."

"Ah, no!" She shook her head at him prettily. "You are wicked! You are up into all the mischief! Have I not hear what wild sums you risk at your

game, that poker? You are famous for it."

"Oh, we play," he admitted with a reckless laugh, "and I suppose we do play rather high."

"High!" she echoed. "*Souzands!* But that is not all. Ha, ha, ha, naughty one! Have I not observe' you lookin' at these pretty creature', the little contadina-girl, an' the poor ladies who have hire' their carriages for two lire to drive up and down the Pincio in their bes' dress an' be admire' by the yo'ng American while the music play'? Which one, I wonder, is it on whose wrist you would mos' like to fasten a bracelet of diamon's? Wicked, I have watch' you look at them——"

"No, no," he interrupted earnestly.

"I have not once looked away from you, I *could n't!*"

Their eyes met, but instantly hers were lowered; the bright smile with which she had been rallying him faded, and there was a pause during which he felt that she had become very grave. When she spoke, it was with a little quaver, and the controlled pathos of her voice was so intense that it evoked a sympathetic catch in his own throat.

"But, my frien', if it should be that I cannot wish you to look so at me, or to speak so to me?"

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed, almost incoherently. "I did n't mean to hurt your feelings. I would n't do anything you 'd think ungentlemanly for the world!"

Her eyes lifted again to his with what he had no difficulty in recognizing as a look of perfect trust; but, behind that, he perceived a darkling sadness.

"I know it is true," she murmured—"I know. But you see there are time' when a woman has sorrow—sorrow of one kind—when she mus' be sure that there is only—only rispec' in the hearts of her frien's."

With that, the intended revelation was complete, and the young man understood, as clearly as if she had told him in so many words, that she was not a widow and that her husband was the cause of her sorrow. His quickened instinct marvelously divined (or else it was conveyed to him by some intangible method of hers) that the Count de Vaurigard

was a very bad case, but that she would not divorce him.

"I know," he answered, profoundly touched. "I understand."

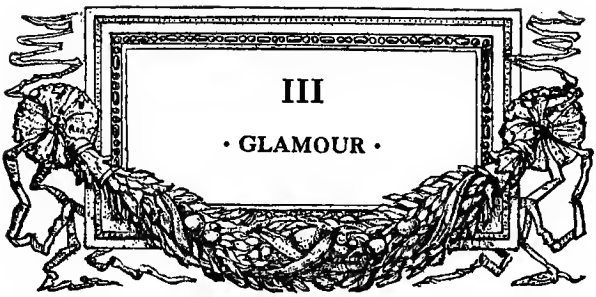
In silent gratitude she laid her hand for a second upon his sleeve. Then her face brightened, and she said gayly:

"But we shall not talk of *me!* Let us see how we can keep you out of mischief at leas' for a little while. I know very well what you will do to-night: you will go to Salone Margherita an' sit in a box like all the wicked Americans——"

"No, indeed, I shall not!"

"Ah, yes, you will!" she laughed. "But until dinner let me keep you from wickedness. Come to tea jus' wiz me, not at the hotel, but at the little apartment I have taken, where it is quiet.

The music is finish', an' all those pretty girl' are goin' away, you see. I am not selfish if I take you from the Pincio now. You will come?"



III

· GLAMOUR ·

It was some fair dream that would be gone too soon, he told himself, as they drove rapidly through the twilight streets, down from the Pincio and up the long slope of the Quirinal. They came to a stop in the gray courtyard of a palazzo, and ascended in a sleepy elevator to the fifth floor. Emerging, they encountered a tall man who was turning away from the Countess' door, which he had just closed. The landing was not lighted, and for a moment he failed to see the American following Madame de Vaurigard.

"Eow, it 's you, is it," he said informally. "Waitin' a devil of a long time for you. I 've gawt a message for you. *He 's* comin'. He writes that Cooley—"

"*Attention!*" she interrupted under her breath, and, stepping forward quickly, touched the bell. "I have brought a frien' of our dear, droll Cooley with me to tea. Monsieur Mellin, you mus' make acquaintance with Monsieur Sneyd. He is English, but we shall forgive him because he is a such ole frien' of mine."

"Ah, yes," said Mellin. "Remember seeing you on the boat, running across the pond."

"Yes, ev coss," responded Mr. Sneyd cordially. "I waws n't so fawchnit as to meet you, but dyuh eold Cooley 's

talked ev you often. Heop I sh'll see maw of you hyuh."

A very trim, very intelligent-looking maid opened the door, and the two men followed Madame de Vaurigard into a square hall, hung with tapestries and lit by two candles of a Brobdingnagian species Mellin had heretofore seen only in cathedrals. Here Mr. Sneyd paused.

"I weon't be bawthring you," he said. "Just a wad with you, Cantess, and I 'm off."

The intelligent-looking maid drew back some heavy curtains leading to a salon beyond the hall, and her mistress smiled brightly at Mellin.

"I shall keep him to jus' his one word," she said, as the young man passed between the curtains.

It was a nobly proportioned room that he entered, so large that, in spite of the amount of old furniture it contained, the first impression it gave was one of spaciousness. Panels of carved and blackened wood lined the walls higher than his head; above them, Spanish leather gleamed here and there with flickerings of red and gilt, reflecting dimly a small but brisk wood fire which crackled in a carved stone fireplace. His feet slipped on the floor of polished tiles and wandered from silky rugs to lose themselves in great black bear skins as in unmown sward. He went from the portrait of a "cinquecento" cardinal to a splendid tryptich set over a Gothic chest, from a cabinet sheltering a collection of old glass to an Annunciation by

an unknown Primitive. He told himself that this was a "room in a book," and became dreamily assured that he was a man in a book. Finally he stumbled upon something almost grotesquely out of place: a large, new, perfectly-appointed card-table with a sliding top, a smooth, thick, green cover and patent compartments.

He halted before this incongruity, regarding it with astonishment. Then a light laugh rippled behind him, and he turned to find Madame de Vaurigard seated in a big red Venetian chair by the fire.

She wore a black lace dress, almost severe in fashion, which gracefully emphasized her slenderness; and she sat with her knees crossed, the firelight

twinkling on the beads of her slipper, on her silken instep, and flashing again from the rings upon the slender fingers she had clasped about her knee.

She had lit a thin, long Russian cigarette.

"You see?" she laughed. "I mus' keep up with the time. I mus' do somesing to hold my frien's about me. Even the ladies like to play now—that breedge w'ich is so tiresome—they play, play, play! And you—you Americans, you refuse to endure us if we do not let you play. So for my frien's when they come to my house—if they wish it, there is that foolish little table. I fear"—she concluded with a bewitching affectation of sadness—"they prefer that to talkin' wiz me."

"You know that could n't be so, *Comtesse*," he said. "I would rather talk to you than—than——"

"Ah, yes, you say so, Monsieur!" She looked at him gravely; a little sigh seemed to breathe upon her lips; she leaned forward nearer the fire, her face wistful in the thin, rosy light, and it seemed to him he had never seen anything so beautiful in his life.

He came across to her and sat upon a stool at her feet. "On my soul," he began huskily, "I swear——"

She laid her finger on her lips, shaking her head gently; and he was silent, while the intelligent maid—at that moment entering—arranged a tea-table and departed.

"American an' Russian, they are the

worse," said the Countess thoughtfully, as she served him with a generous cup, laced with rum, "but the American he is the bes' to play *wiz*." Mellin found her irresistible when she said "wiz."

"Why is that?"

"Oh, the Russian play high, yes—but the American"—she laughed delightedly and stretched her arms wide—"*he* make' it all a joke! He is beeg like his beeg country. If he win or lose, *he* don' care! Ah, I mus' tell you of my great American frien', that Honor-able Chanlair Pedlow, who is comin' to Rome. You have heard of Honor-able Chanlair Pedlow in America?"

"I remember hearing that name."

"Ah, I shall make you know him. He is a man of distinction; he did sit in

your Chamber of Deputies—what you call it?—yes, your Con-gress. He is funny, eccentric—always he roar like a lion—Boum!—but so simple, so good, a man of such fine heart—so lovable!"

"I 'll be glad to meet him," said Mellin coldly.

"An', oh, yes, I almos' forget to tell you," she went on, "your frien', that dear Cooley, he is on his way from Monte Carlo in his automobile. I have a note from him to-day."

"Good sort of fellow, little Cooley, in his way," remarked her companion graciously. "Not especially intellectual or that, you know. His father was a manufacturer chap, I believe, or something of the sort. I suppose you saw a lot of him in Paris?"

"Eh, I thought he is dead!" cried Madame de Vaurigard.

"The father is. I mean, little Cooley."

"Oh, yes," she laughed softly. "We had some gay times, a little party of us. We shall be happy here, too; you will see. I mus' make a little dinner very soon, but not unless you will come. You will?"

"Do you want me very much?"

He placed his empty cup on the table and leaned closer to her, smiling. She did not smile in response; instead, her eyes fell and there was the faintest, pathetic quiver of her lower lip.

"Already you know that," she said in a low voice.

She rose quickly, turned away from him and walked across the room to the

curtains which opened upon the hall. One of these she drew back.

"My frien', you mus' go now," she said in the same low voice. "To-morrow I will see you again. Come at four an' you shall drive with me—but not—not more—*now*. Please!"

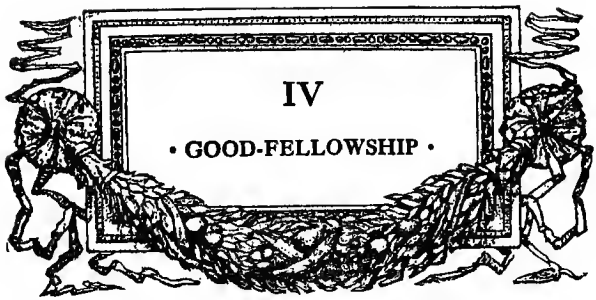
She stood waiting, not looking at him, but with head bent and eyes veiled. As he came near she put out a limp hand. He held it for a few seconds of distinctly emotional silence, then strode swiftly into the hall.

She immediately let the curtain fall behind him, and as he got his hat and coat he heard her catch her breath sharply with a sound like a little sob.

Dazed with glory, he returned to the

hotel. In the lobby he approached the glittering concierge and said firmly:

"What is the Salone Margherita? Can you get me a box there to-night?"



He confessed his wickedness to Madame de Vaurigard the next afternoon as they drove out the Appian Way. "A fellow must have just a bit of a fling, you know," he said; "and, really, Salone Margherita is n't so tremendously wicked."

She shook her head at him in friendly raillery. "Ah, that may be; but how many of those little dancing-girl' have you invite to supper afterward?"

This was a delicious accusation, and though he shook his head in virtuous de-

nial he was before long almost convinced that he *had* given a rather dashing supper after the vaudeville and had *not* gone quietly back to the hotel, only stopping by the way to purchase an orange and a pocketful of horse-chestnuts to eat in his room.

It was a happy drive for Robert Russ Mellin, though not happier than that of the next day. Three afternoons they spent driving over the Campagna, then back to Madame de Vaurigard's apartment for tea by the firelight, till the enraptured American began to feel that the dream in which he had come to live must of happy necessity last forever.

On the fourth afternoon, as he stepped out of the hotel elevator into the corridor, he encountered Mr. Sneyd.

"Just stottin', eh?" said the Englishman, taking an envelope from his pocket. "Lucky I caught you. This is for you. I just saw the Cantess and she teold me to give it you. Herry and read it and kem on t' the Amairikin Baw. Chap I want you to meet. Eold Cooley's thyah too. Gawt in with his tourin'-caw at noon."

"You will forgive, dear friend," wrote Madame de Vaurigard, "if I ask you that we renounce our drive to-day. You see, I wish to have that little dinner to-night and must make preparation. Honorable Chandler Pedlow arrived this morning from Paris and that droll Mr. Cooley I have learn is coincidentally arrived also. You see I think it would be very pleasant to have the dinner to welcome these friends on their arrival. You will come surely—or I shall be so truly miserable. You know it perhaps too well! We shall have a happy evening if you

come, to console us for renouncing our drive. A thousand of my prettiest wishes for you.

"HÉLÉNE."

The signature alone consoled him. To have that note from her, to own it, was like having one of her gloves or her fan. He would keep it forever, he thought; indeed, he more than half expressed a sentiment to that effect in the response which he wrote in the aquarium, while Sneyd waited for him at a table near by. The Englishman drew certain conclusions in regard to this reply, since it permitted a waiting friend to consume three long tumblers of brandy-and-soda before it was finished. However, Mr. Sneyd kept his reflections to himself, and, when the epistle had been dispatched by a messenger,

took the American's arm and led him to the "American Bar" of the hotel, a region hitherto unexplored by Mellin.

Leaning against the bar were Cooley and the man whom Mellin had seen lolling beside Madame de Vaurigard in Cooley's automobile in Paris, the same gross person for whom he had instantly conceived a strong repugnance, a feeling not at once altered by a closer view.

Cooley greeted Mellin uproariously and Mr. Sneyd introduced the fat man. "Mr. Mellin, the Honorable Chandler Pedlow," he said; nor was the shock to the first-named gentleman lessened by young Cooley's adding, "Best feller in the world!"

Mr. Pedlow's eyes were sheltered so deeply beneath florid rolls of flesh that

all one saw of them was an inscrutable gleam of blue; but, small though they were, they were not shifty, for they met Mellin's with a squareness that was almost brutal. He offered a fat paw, wet by a full glass which he set down too suddenly on the bar.

"Shake," he said, in a loud and husky voice, "and be friends! Tommy," he added to the attendant, "another round of Martinis."

"Not for me," said Mellin hastily. "I don't often—"

"*What!*" Mr. Pedlow roared suddenly. "Why, the first words Countess de Vaurigard says to me this afternoon was, 'I want you to meet my young friend Mellin,' she says; 'the gamest little Indian that ever come down the pike!

He 's game,' she says—'he 'll see you *all* under the table!' That 's what the smartest little woman in the world, the Countess de Vaurigard, says about you."

This did not seem very closely to echo Madame de Vaurigard's habit of phrasing, but Mellin perceived that it might be only the fat man's way of putting things.

"You ain't goin' back on *her*, are you?" continued Mr. Pedlow. "You ain't goin' to make her out a liar? I tell you, when the Countess de Vaurigard says a man 's game, he *is* game!" He laid his big paw cordially on Mellin's shoulder and smiled, lowering his voice to a friendly whisper. "And I 'll bet ten thousand dollars right out of my pants pocket you *are* game, too!"

He pressed a glass into the other's hand. Smiling feebly, the embarrassed Mellin accepted it.

"Make it four more, Tommy," said Pedlow. "And here," continued this thoughtful man, "I don't go bandying no ladies' names around a bar-room—that ain't my style—but I do want to propose a toast. I won't name her, but you all know who I mean."

"Sure we do," interjected Cooley warmly. "Queen! That 's what she is."

"Here 's *to* her," continued Mr. Pedlow. "Here 's to her—brightest and best—and no heel-taps! And now let 's set down over in the corner and take it easy. It ain't hardly five o'clock yet, and we can set here comfortable, gittin'

ready for dinner, until half-past six, anyway."

Whereupon the four seated themselves about a tabouret in the corner, and, a waiter immediately bringing them four fresh glasses from the bar, Mellin began to understand what Mr. Pedlow meant by "gittin' ready for dinner." The burden of the conversation was carried almost entirely by the Honorable Chandler, though Cooley, whose boyish face was deeply flushed, now and then managed to interrupt by talking louder than the fat man. Mr. Sneyd sat silent.

"Good ole Sneyd," said Pedlow. "*He* never talks, jest saws wood. Only Britisher I ever liked. Plays cards like a goat."

"He played a mighty good game on the steamer," said Cooley warmly.

"I don't care what he did on the steamer, he played like a goat the only time *I* ever played with him. You know he did. I reckon you was *there!*"

"Should say I *was* there! He played mighty well—"

"Like a goat," reiterated the fat man firmly.

"Nothing of the sort. You had a run of hands, that was all. Nobody can go against the kind of luck you had that night; and you took it away from Sneyd and me in rolls. But we 'll land you pretty soon, won't we, ole Sneydie?"

"We sh'll have a shawt at him, at least," said the Englishman.

"Perhaps he won't want us to try," young Cooley pursued derisively. "Perhaps he thinks *I* play like a goat, too!"

Mr. Pedlow threw back his head and roared. "Give me somep'n easy! You don't know no more how to play a hand of cards than a giraffe does. I 'll throw in all of my Blue Gulch gold-stock—and it 's worth eight hundred thousand dollars if it 's worth a cent—I 'll put it up against that tin automobile of yours, divide chips even and play you freeze-out for it. You play cards? Go learn hop-scotch!"

"You wait!" exclaimed the other indignantly. "Next time we play we 'll make you look so small you 'll think you 're back in Congress!"

At this Mr. Pedlow again threw back

his head and roared, his vast body so shaken with mirth that the glass he held in his hand dropped to the floor.

"There," said Cooley, "that 's the second Martini you 've spilled. You 're two behind the rest of us."

"What of it?" bellowed the fat man. "There 's plenty comin', ain't there? Four more, Tommy, and bring cigars. Don't take a cent from none of these Indians. Gentlemen, your money ain't good here. I own this bar, and this is my night."

Mellin had begun to feel at ease, and after a time—as they continued to sit—he realized that his repugnance to Mr. Pedlow was wearing off; he felt that there must be good in any one whom Madame de Vaurigard liked. She had

spoken of Pedlow often on their drives; he was an "eccentric," she said, an "original." Why not accept her verdict? Besides, Pedlow was a man of distinction and force; he had been in Congress; he was a millionaire; and, as became evident in the course of a long recital of the principal events of his career, most of the great men of the time were his friends and protégés.

" 'Well, Mack,' says I one day when we were in the House together"—(thus Mr. Pedlow, alluding to the late President McKinley)—" 'Mack,' says I, 'if you 'd drop that double standard business'—he was waverin' toward silver along then—'I don't know but I might git the boys to nominate you fer President.' 'I 'll think it over,' he says—'I 'll

think it over.' You remember me tellin' you about that at the time, don't you, Sneyd, when you was in the British Legation at Washin'ton?"

"Pahfictly," said Mr. Sneyd, lighting a cigar with great calmness.

"'Yes,' I says, 'Mack,' I says, 'if you 'll drop it, I 'll turn in and git you the nomination.'"

"Did he drop it?" asked Mellin innocently.

Mr. Pedlow leaned forward and struck the young man's knee a resounding blow with the palm of his hand.

"He was *nominated*, was n't he?"

"Time to dress," announced Mr. Sneyd, looking at his watch.

"One more round first," insisted Cooley with prompt vehemence. "Let 's

finish with our first toast again. Can't drink that too often."

This proposition was received with warmest approval, and they drank standing.

"Brightest and best!" shouted Mr. Pedlow.

"Queen! What she is!" exclaimed Cooley.

"*Ma belle Marquise!*" whispered Mellin tenderly, as the rim touched his lips.

A small, keen-faced man, whose steady gray eyes were shielded by tortoise-rimmed spectacles, had come into the room and now stood quietly at the bar, sipping a glass of Vichy. He was sharply observant of the party as it broke up, Pedlow and Sneyd preceding

the younger men to the corridor, and, as the latter turned to follow, the stranger stepped quickly forward, speaking Cooley's name.

"What 's the matter?"

"Perhaps you don't remember me. My name 's Cornish. I 'm a newspaper man, a correspondent." (He named a New York paper.) "I 'm down here to get a Vatican story. I knew your father for a number of years before his death, and I think I may claim that he was a friend of mine."

"That 's good," said the youth cordially. "If I had n't a fine start already, and was n't in a hurry to dress. we 'd have another."

"You were pointed out to me in Paris," continued Cornish. "I found

where you were staying and called on you the next day, but you had just started for the Riviera." He hesitated, glancing at Mellin. "Can you give me half a dozen words with you in private?"

"You 'll have to excuse me, I 'm afraid. I 've only got about ten minutes to dress. See you to-morrow."

"I should like it to be as soon as possible," the journalist said seriously. "It is n't on my own account, and I——"

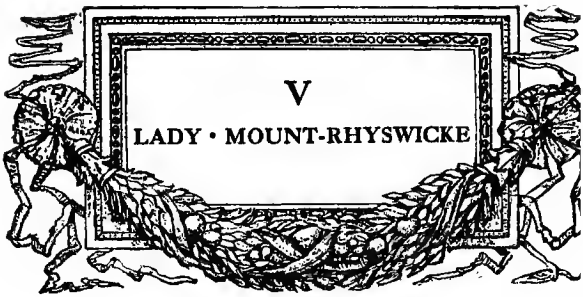
"All right. You come to my room at ten t' morrow morning?"

"Well, if you can't possibly make it to-night," said Cornish reluctantly. "I wish——"

"Can't possibly."

And Cooley, taking Mellin by the

arm, walked rapidly down the corridor. "Funny ole correspondent," he murmured. "What do *I* know about the Vatican?"



THE four friends of Madame d Vaurigard were borne to he apartment from the Magnif ique in Cooley's big car. They saile triumphantly down and up the hills in cool and bracing air, under a moon tha shone as brightly for them as it had fo Cæsar, and Mellin's soul was buoyan within him. He thought of Cranstoi and laughed aloud. What would Cran ston say if it could see him in a sixty horse touring-car, with two millionaire and an English diplomat, brother of a

earl, and all on the way to dine with a countess? If Mary Kramer could see him! . . . Poor Mary Kramer! Poor little Mary Kramer!

A man-servant took their coats in Madame de Vaurigard's hall, where they could hear through the curtains the sound of one or two voices in cheerful conversation.

Sneyd held up his hand.

"Listen," he said. "Shawly, that is n't Lady Mount-Rhyswicke's voice! She could n't be in Reom—always a Rhyswicke Caws'l for Decembah. By Jev, it is!"

"Nothin' of the kind," said Pedlow. "I know Lady Mount-Rhyswicke as well as I know you. I started her father in business when he was clerkin' behind

a counter in Liverpool. I give him the money to begin on. 'Make good,' says I, 'that 's all. Make good!' And he done it, too. Educated his daughter fit fer a princess, married her to Mount-Rhyswicke, and when he died left her ten million dollars if he left her a cent! I know Madge Mount-Rhyswicke and that ain't her voice."

A peal of silvery laughter rang from the other side of the curtain.

"They 've heard you," said Cooley.

"An' who could help it?" Madame de Vaurigard herself threw back the curtains. "Who could help hear our great, dear, ole lion? How he roar'!"

She wore a white velvet "princesse" gown of a fashion which was a shade less than what is called "daring," with a

rope of pearls falling from her neck and a diamond star in her dark hair. Standing with one arm uplifted to the curtains, and with the mellow glow of candles and firelight behind her, she was so lovely that both Mellin and Cooley stood breathlessly still until she changed her attitude. This she did only to move toward them, extending a hand to each, letting Cooley seize the right and Mellin the left.

Each of them was pleased with what he got, particularly Mellin. "The left is nearer the heart," he thought.

She led them through the curtains, not withdrawing her hands until they entered the salon. She might have led them out of her fifth-story window in that fashion, had she chosen.

"My two wicked boys!" she laughed tenderly.

This also pleased both of them, though each would have preferred to be her only wicked boy—a preference which, perhaps, had something to do with the later events of the evening.

"Aha! I know you both; before twenty minute' you will be makin' love to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. Behol' those two already! An' they are only ole frien's."

She pointed to Pedlow and Sneyd. The fat man was shouting at a woman in pink satin, who lounged, half-reclining, among a pile of cushions upon a divan near the fire; Sneyd gallantly bending over her to kiss her hand.

"It is a very little dinner, you see,"

continued the hostess, "only seven, but we shall be seven time' happier."

The seventh person proved to be the Italian, Corni, who had surrendered his seat in Madame de Vaurigard's victoria to Mellin on the Pincio. He presently made his appearance followed by a waiter bearing a tray of glasses filled with a pink liquid, while the Countess led her two wicked boys across the room to present them to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. Already Mellin was forming sentences for his next letter to the Cranston Telegraph: "Lady Mount-Rhyswicke said to me the other evening, while discussing the foreign policy of Great Britain, in Comtesse de Vaurigard's salon . . ." "An English peeress of pronounced literary acumen has been

giving me rather confidentially her opinion of our American poets . . ."

The inspiration of these promising fragments was a large, weary-looking person, with no lack of powdered shoulder above her pink bodice and a profusion of "undulated" hair of so decided a blond that it might have been suspected that the decision had lain with the lady herself.

"Howjdo," she said languidly, when Mellin's name was pronounced to her. "There 's a man behind you tryin' to give you something to drink."

"Who was it said these were Martinis?" snorted Pedlow. "They 've got perfumery in 'em."

"Ah, what a bad lion it is!" Madame de Vaurigard lifted both hands in mock

horror. "Roar, lion, roar!" she cried. "An' think of the emotion of our good Cavaliere Corni, who have come an hour early jus' to make them for us! I ask Monsieur Mellin if it is not good."

"And I 'll leave it to Cooley," said Pedlow. "If he can drink all of his I 'll eat crow!"

Thus challenged, the two young men smilingly accepted glasses from the waiter, and lifted them on high.

"Same toast," said Cooley. "Queen!"

"*A la belle Marquise!*"

Gallantly they drained the glasses at a gulp, and Madame de Vaurigard clapped her hands.

"Bravo!" she cried. "You see? Corni and I, we win."

"Look at their faces!" said Mr. Ped-

low, tactlessly drawing attention to what was, for the moment, an undeniably painful sight. "Don't tell *me* an Italian knows how to make a good Martini!"

Mellin profoundly agreed, but, as he joined the small procession to the Countess' dinner-table, he was certain that an Italian at least knew how to make a strong one.

The light in the dining-room was provided by six heavily-shaded candles on the table; the latter decorated with delicate lines of orchids. The chairs were large and comfortable, covered with tapestry; the glass was old Venetian, and the servants, moving like useful ghosts in the shadow outside the circle of mellow light, were particularly

efficient in the matter of keeping the wine-glasses full. Madame de Vaurigard had put Pedlow on her right, Cooley on her left, with Mellin directly opposite her, next to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. Mellin was pleased, because he thought he would have the Countess's face toward him. Anything would have pleased him just then.

"This is the kind of table *everybody* ought to have," he observed to the party in general, as he finished his first glass of champagne. "I 'm going to have it like this at my place in the States—if I ever decide to go back. I 'll have six separate candlesticks like this, not a candelabrum, and that will be the only light in the room. And I 'll never have anything but orchids on my table——"

"For my part," Lady Mount-Rhyswicke interrupted in the loud, tired monotone which seemed to be her only manner of speaking, "I like more light. I like all the light that 's goin'."

"If Lady Mount-Rhyswicke sat at *my* table," returned Mellin dashingly, "I should wish all the light in the world to shine upon so happy an event."

"Hear the man!" she drawled. "He 's proposin' to me. Thinks I 'm a widow."

There was a chorus of laughter, over which rose the bellow of Mr. Pedlow.

" 'He 's game!' she says—and *ain't* he?"

Across the table Madame de Vaurigard's eyes met Mellin's with a mocking intelligence so complete that he caught her message without need of the words

she noiselessly formed with her lips: "I tol' you you would be makin' love to her!"

He laughed joyously in answer. Why should n't he flirt with Lady Mount-Rhyswicke? He was thoroughly happy; his Héléne, his *belle Marquise*, sat across the table from him sending messages to him with her eyes. He adored her, but he liked Lady Mount-Rhyswicke—he liked everybody and everything in the world. He liked Pedlow particularly, and it no longer troubled him that the fat man should be a friend of Madame de Vaurigard. Pedlow was a "character" and a wit as well. Mellin laughed heartily at everything the Honorable Chandler Pedlow said.

"This is life," remarked the young man to his fair neighbor.

"What is? Sittin' round a table, eatin' and drinkin'?"

"Ah, lovely skeptic!" She looked at him strangely, but he continued with growing enthusiasm: "I mean to sit at such a table as this, with such a *chef*, with such wines—to know one crowded hour like this is to live! Not a thing is missing; all this swagger furniture, the rich atmosphere of smartness about the whole place; best of all, the company. It 's a great thing to have the *real* people around you, the right sort, you know, socially; people you 'd ask to your own table at home. There are only seven, but every one *distingué*, every one——"

She leaned both elbows on the table

with her hands palm to palm, and, resting her cheek against the back of her left hand, looked at him steadily.

"And you—are you distinguished, too?"

"Oh, I would n't be much known over *here*," he said modestly.

"Do you write poetry?"

"Oh, not professionally, though it is published. I suppose"—he sipped his champagne with his head a little to one side as though judging its quality—"I suppose I 've been more or less a dilettante. I 've knocked about the world a good bit."

"Héléne says you 're one of these leisure American billionaires like Mr. Cooley there," she said in her tired voice.

"Oh, none of us are really quite

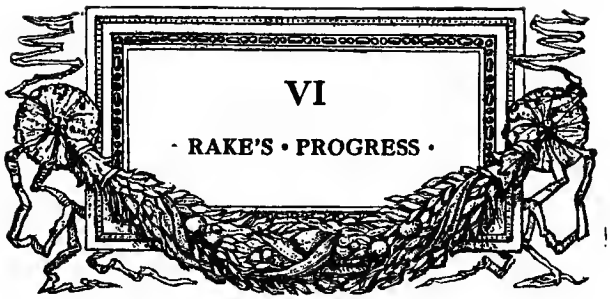
billionaires." He laughed deprecatingly.

"No, I suppose not—not really. Go on and tell me some more about life and this distinguished company."

"Hey, folks!" Mr. Pedlow's roar broke in upon this dialogue. "You two are gittin' mighty thick over there. We 're drinking a toast, and you 'll have to break away long enough to join in."

"Queen! That 's what she is!" shouted Cooley.

Mellin lifted his glass with the others and drank to Madame de Vaurigard, but the woman at his side did not change her attitude and continued to sit with her elbows on the table, her cheek on the back of her hand, watching him thoughtfully.



MANY toasts were uproariously honored, the health of each member of the party in turn, then the country of each: France and England first, out of courtesy to the ladies, Italy next, since this beautiful and extraordinary meeting of distinguished people (as Mellin remarked in a short speech he felt called upon to make) took place in that wonderful land, then the United States. This last toast the gentlemen felt it necessary to honor by standing in their chairs.

[*Song: The Star-spangled Banner—without words—by Mr. Cooley and chorus.*]

When the cigars were brought, the ladies graciously remained, adding tiny spirals of smoke from their cigarettes to the layers of blue haze which soon overhung the table. Through this haze, in the gentle light (which seemed to grow softer and softer) Mellin saw the face of Héléne de Vaurigard, luminous as an angel's. She *was* an angel—and the others were gods. What could be more appropriate in Rome? Lady Mount-Rhyswicke was Juno, but more beautiful. For himself, he felt like a god too, Olympic in serenity.

He longed for mysterious dangers. How debonair he would stroll among

them! He wished to explore the unknown; felt the need of a splendid adventure, and had a happy premonition that one was coming nearer and nearer. He favored himself with a hopeful vision of the apartment on fire, Robert Russ Mellin smiling negligently among the flames and Madame de Vaurigard kneeling before him in adoration. Immersed in delight, he puffed his cigar and let his eyes rest dreamily upon the face of Héléne. He was quite undisturbed by an argument, more a commotion than a debate, between Mr. Pedlow and young Cooley. It ended by their rising, the latter overturning a chair in his haste.

"I don't know the rudiments, don't I?" cried the boy. "You wait! Ole Sneydie and I 'll trim you down!

Corni says he 'll play, too. Come on, Mellin."

"I won't go unless Héléne goes," said Mellin. "What are you going to do when you get there?"

"Alas, my frien'!" exclaimed Madame de Vaurigard, rising, "is it not what I tol' you? Always you are never content wizout your play. You come to dinner an' when it is finish' you play, play, play!"

"*Play?*" He sprang to his feet. "Bravo! That 's the very thing I 've been wanting to do. I knew there was something I wanted to do, but I could n't think what it was."

Lady Mount-Rhyswicke followed the others into the salon, but Madame de Vaurigard waited just inside the doorway for Mellin.

"*High* play!" he cried. "We must play high! I won't play any other way. —I want to play *high!*"

"Ah, wicked one! What did I tell you?"

He caught her hand. "And you must play too, Héléne."

"No, no," she laughed breathlessly.

"Then you 'll watch. Promise you 'll watch me. I won't let you go till you promise to watch me."

"I shall adore it, my frien'!"

"Mellin," called Cooley from the other room. "You comin' or not?"

"Can't you see me?" answered Mellin hilariously, entering with Madame de Vaurigard, who was rosy with laughter. "Peculiar thing to look at a man and not see him."

Candles were lit in many sconces on the walls, and the card-table had been pushed to the centre of the room, little towers of blue, white and scarlet counters arranged upon it in orderly rows like miniature castles.

"Now, then," demanded Cooley, "are the ladies goin' to play?"

"Never!" cried Madame de Vaurigard.

"All right," said the youth cheerfully; "you can look on. Come and sit by me for a mascot."

"You 'll need a mascot, my boy!" shouted Pedlow. "That 's right, though; take her."

He pushed a chair close to that in which Cooley had already seated himself, and Madame de Vaurigard

dropped into it, laughing. "Mellin, you set there," he continued, pushing the young man into a seat opposite Cooley. "We 'll give both you young fellers a mascot." He turned to Lady Mount-Rhyswicke, who had gone to the settee by the fire. "Madge, you come and set by Mellin," he commanded jovially. "Maybe he 'll forget you ain't a widow again."

"I don't believe I care much about bein' anybody's mascot to-night," she answered. There was a hint of anger in her tired monotone.

"What?" He turned from the table and walked over to the fireplace. "I reckon I did n't understand you," he said quietly, almost gently. "You better come, had n't you?"

She met his inscrutable little eyes steadily. A faint redness slowly revealed itself on her powdered cheeks; then she followed him back to the table and took the place he had assigned to her at Mellin's elbow.

"I 'll bank," said Pedlow, taking a chair between Cooley and the Italian, "unless somebody wants to take it off my hands. Now, what are we playing?"

"Pokah," responded Sneyd with mild sarcasm.

"Bravo!" cried Mellin. "That 's *my* game. Ber-*ravo!*"

This was so far true: it was the only game upon which he had ever ventured money; he had played several times when the wagers were allowed to reach a limit of twenty-five cents.

"You know what I mean, I reckon," said Pedlow. "I mean what we are playin' *fer?*"

"Twenty-five franc limit," responded Cooley authoritatively. "Double for jacks. Play two hours and settle when we quit."

Mellin leaned back in his chair. "You call that high?" he asked, with a sniff of contempt. "Why not double it?"

The fat man hammered the table with his fist delightedly. " 'He 's game,' she says. 'He 's the gamest little Indian ever come down the big road!' she says. Was she right? What? Maybe she was n't! We 'll double it before very long, my boy; this 'll do to start on. There." He distributed some of the small towers of ivory counters and made

a memorandum in a notebook. "There four hundred apiece."

"That all?" inquired Mellin, wher upon Mr. Pedlow uproariously repeate Madame de Vaurigard's alleged tribut

As the game began, the intelligen looking maid appeared from the dining room, bearing bottles of whisky an soda, and these she deposited upo small tables at the convenience of th players, so that at the conclusion of th first encounter in the gentle tournamer there was material for a toast to the ga lant who had won it.

"Here 's to the gamest Indian of u all," proposed the fat man. "Did yo notice him call me with a pair of tens And me queen-high!"

Mellin drained a deep glass in honc

of himself. "On my soul, Chan' Pedlow, I think you 're the bes' fellow in the whole world," he said gratefully. "Only trouble with you—you don't want to play high enough."

He won again and again, adding other towers of counters to his original allotment, so that he had the semblance of a tiny castle. When the cards had been dealt for the fifth time he felt the light contact of a slipper touching his foot under the table.

That slipper, he decided (from the nature of things) could belong to none other than his Héléne, and even as he came to this conclusion the slight pressure against his foot was gently but distinctly increased thrice. He pressed the slipper in return with his shoe, at the

same time giving Madame de Vaurigard a look of grateful surprise and tenderness, which threw her into a confusion so evidently genuine that for an unworthy moment he had a jealous suspicion she had meant the little caress for some other.

It was a disagreeable thought, and, in the hope of banishing it, he refilled his glass; but his mood had begun to change. It seemed to him that Héléne was watching Cooley a great deal too devotedly. Why had she consented to sit by Cooley, when she had promised to watch Robert Russ Mellin? He observed the pair stealthily.

Cooley consulted her in laughing whispers upon every discard, upon every bet. Now and then, in their

whisperings, Cooley's hair touched hers; sometimes she laid her hand on his the more conveniently to look at his cards. Mellin began to be enraged. Did she think that puling milksop had as much as a shadow of the daring, the devilry, the carelessness of consequences which lay within Robert Russ Mellin? "Consequences?" What were they? There were no such things! She would not look at him—well, he would make her! Thenceforward he raised every bet by another to the extent of the limit agreed upon.

Mr. Cooley was thoroughly happy. He did not resemble Ulysses; he would never have had himself bound to the mast; and there were already sounds of unearthly sweetness in his ears. His

conferences with his lovely hostess easily consoled him for his losses. In addition, he was triumphing over the boaster, for Mr. Pedlow, with a very ill grace and swearing (not under his breath), was losing too. The Countess, reiterating for the hundredth time that Cooley was a "wicked one," sweetly constituted herself his cup-bearer; kept his glass full and brought him fresh cigars.

Mellin dealt her furious glances, and filled his own glass, for Lady Mount-Rhyswicke plainly had no conception of herself in the rôle of a Hebe. The hospitable Pedlow, observing this neglect, was moved to chide her.

"Look at them two cooing doves over there," he said reproachfully, a jerk of his bulbous thumb indicating Madame

de Vaurigard and her young protégé. "Madge, can't you do nothin' fer our friend the Indian? Can't you even help him to sody?"

"Oh, perhaps," she answered with the slightest flash from her tired eyes. Then she nonchalantly lifted Mellin's replenished glass from the table and drained it. This amused Cooley.

"I like that!" he chuckled. "That 's *one* way of helpin' a feller! Héléne, can you do any better than that?"

"Ah, this dear, droll Cooley!"

The tantalizing witch lifted the youth's glass to his lips and let him drink, as a mother helps a thirsty child. "*Bébé!*" she laughed endearingly.

As the lovely Héléne pronounced that word, Lady Mount-Rhyswicke was

leaning forward to replace Mellin's empty glass upon the table.

"I don't care whether you 're a widow or not!" he shouted furiously. And he resoundingly kissed her massive shoulder.

There was a wild shout of laughter; even the imperturbable Sneyd (who had continued to win steadily) wiped tears from his eyes, and Madame de Vaurigard gave way to intermittent hysteria throughout the ensuing half-hour.

For a time Mellin sat grimly observing this inexplicable merriment with a cold smile.

"Laugh on!" he commanded with bitter satire, some ten minutes after play had been resumed—and was instantly obeyed.

Whereupon his mood underwent another change, and he became convinced that the world was a warm and kindly place, where it was good to live. He forgot that he was jealous of Cooley and angry with the Countess; he liked everybody again, especially Lady Mount-Rhyswicke. "Won't you sit farther forward?" he begged her earnestly; "so that I can see your beautiful golden hair?"

He heard but dimly the spasmodic uproar that followed. "Laugh on!" he repeated with a swoop of his arm. "I don't care! Don't you care either, Mrs. Mount-Rhyswicke. Please sit where I can see your beautiful golden hair. Don't be afraid I 'll kiss you again. I would n't do it for the whole world.

You 're one of the noblest women I ever knew. I feel that 's true. I don't know how I know it, but I know it. Let 'em laugh!"

After this everything grew more and more hazy to him. For a time there was, in the centre of the haze, a nimbus of light which revealed his cards to him and the towers of chips which he constantly called for and which as constantly disappeared—like the towers of a castle in Spain. Then the haze thickened, and the one thing clear to him was a phrase from an old-time novel he had read long ago:

"Debt of honor."

The three words appeared to be written in flames against a background of dense fog. A debt of honor was a

promissory note which had to be paid on Monday, and the appeal to the obdurate grandfather—a peer of England, the Earl of Mount-Rhyswicke, in fact—was made at midnight, Sunday. The fog grew still denser, lifted for a moment while he wrote his name many times on slips of blue paper; closed down once more, and again lifted—out-of-doors this time—to show him a lunatic ballet of moons dancing streakily upon the horizon.

He heard himself say quite clearly, "All right, old man, thank you; but don't bother about me," to a pallid but humorous Cooley in evening clothes; the fog thickened; oblivion closed upon him for a seeming second. . . .



SUDDENLY he sat up in bed in his room at the Magnifique, gazing upon a disconsolate Cooley in gray tweeds who sat heaped in a chair at the foot of the bed with his head in his hands.

Mellin's first sensation was of utter mystification; his second was more corporeal: the consciousness of physical misery, of consuming fever, of aches that ran over his whole body, converging to a dreadful climax in his head, of a throat so immoderately parched it

seemed to crackle, and of a thirst so avid it was a passion. His eye fell upon a carafe of water on a chair at his bedside; he seized upon it with a shaking hand and drank half its contents before he set it down. The action attracted his companion's attention and he looked up, showing a pale and haggard countenance.

"How do you feel?" inquired Cooley with a wan smile.

Mellin's head dropped back upon the pillow and he made one or two painful efforts to speak before he succeeded in finding a ghastly semblance of his voice.

"I thought I was at Madame de Vaurigard's."

"You were," said the other, adding grimly: "We both were."

"But that was only a minute ago."

"It was six hours ago. It 's goin' on ten o'clock in the morning."

"I don't understand how that can be. How did I get here?"

"I brought you. I was pretty bad, but you—— I never saw anything like you! From the time you kissed Lady Mount-Rhyswicke——"

Mellin sat bolt upright in bed, staring wildly. He began to tremble violently.

"Don't you remember that?" asked Cooley.

Suddenly he did. The memory of it came with inexorable clarity; he crossed forearms over his horror-stricken face and fell back upon the pillow.

"Oh," he gasped. "Un-speakable! Un-speakable!"

"Lord! Don't worry about that! I don't think she minded."

"It 's the thought of Madame de Vaurigard—it kills me! The horror of it—that I should do such a thing in her house! She 'll never speak to me again, she ought n't to; she ought to send her groom to beat me! You can't think what I 've lost——"

"Can't I?" Mr. Cooley rose from his chair and began to pace up and down the chamber. "I can guess to within a thousand francs of what *I* 've lost! I had to get the hotel to cash a check on New York for me this morning. I 've a habit of carrying all my money in bills, and a fool trick, too. Well, I 'm cured of it!"

"Oh, if it were only a little *money*

and nothing else that I 'd lost! The money means nothing." Mellin choked.

"I suppose you 're pretty well fixed. Well, so am I," Cooley shook his head, "but money certainly means something to me!"

"It would n't if you 'd thrown away the most precious friendship of your life."

"See here," said Cooley, halting at the foot of the bed and looking at his stricken companion from beneath frowning brows, "I guess I can see how it is with you, and I 'll tell you frankly it 's been the same with me. I never met such a fascinatin' woman in my life: she throws a reg'ler ole-fashioned *spell* over you! Now I hate to say it, but I can't help it, because it plain hits me in the

face every time I think of it; the truth is —well, sir, I 'm afraid you and me have had little red soldier-coats and caps put on us and strings tied to our belts while we turned somersets for the children."

"I don't understand. I don't know what you 're talking about."

"No? It seems to get more and more simple to me. I 've been thinking it all over and over again. I can't *help* it! See here: I met Sneyd on the steamer, without any introduction. He sort of warmed into the game in the smoking-room, and he won straight along the trip. He called on me in London and took me to meet the Countess at her hotel. We three went to the theatre and lunch and so forth a few times; and when I left for Paris she turned up on

the way: that 's when you met her. Couple of days later, Sneyd came over, and he and the Countess introduced me to dear ole friend Pedlow. So you see, I don't rightly even know who any of 'em really *are:* just took 'em for granted, as it were. We had lots of fun, I admit that, honkin' about in my car. We only played cards once, and that was in her apartment the last night before I left Paris, but that one time Pedlow won fifteen thousand francs from me. When I told them my plans, how I was goin' to motor down to Rome, she said *she* would be in Rome—and, I tell you, I was happy as a poodle-pup about it. Sneyd said he might be in Rome along about then, and open-hearted ole Pedlow said not to be surprised if *he* turned up, too.

Well, he did, almost to the minute, and in the meantime she 'd got *you* hooked on, fine and tight."

"I don't understand you," Mellin lifted himself painfully on an elbow. "I don't know what you 're getting at, but it seems to me that you 're speaking disrespectfully of an angel that I 've insulted, and I——"

"Now see here, Mellin, I 'll tell you something." The boy's white face showed sudden color and there was a catch in his voice. "I was—I 've been mighty near in *love* with that woman! But I 've had a kind of a shock; I 've got my common-sense back, and I 'm *not*, any more. I don't know exactly how much money I had, but it was between thirty-five and thirty-eight thousand

francs, and Sneyd won it all after we took off the limit—over seven thousand dollars—at her table last night. Putting two and two together, honestly it looks bad. It looks *mighty* bad! Now, I 'm pretty well fixed, and yesterday I did n't care whether school kept or not, but seven thousand dollars is real money to anybody! My old man worked pretty hard for his first seven thousand, I guess, and"—he gulped—"he 'd think a lot of me for lettin' go of it the way I did last night, *would n't* he? You never *see* things like this till the next morning! And you remember that other woman sat where she could see every hand *you* drew, and the Countess——"

"Stop!" Mellin flung one arm up violently, striking the headboard with

his knuckles. "I won't hear a syllable against Madame de Vaurigard!"

Young Cooley regarded him steadily for a moment. "Have you remembered yet," he said slowly, "how much *you* lost last night?"

"I only remember that I behaved like an unspeakable boor in the presence of the divinest creature that ever——"

Cooley disregarded the outburst, and said:

"When we settled, you had a pad of express company checks worth six hundred dollars. You signed all of 'em and turned 'em over to Sneyd with three one-hundred-lire bills, which was all the cash you had with you. Then you gave him your note for twelve thousand francs to be paid within three days. You

made a great deal of fuss about its being a 'debt of honor.'" He paused. "You had n't remembered that, had you?"

Mellin had closed his eyes. He lay quite still and made no answer.

"No, I 'll bet you had n't," said Cooley, correctly deducing the fact. "You 're well off, or you would n't be at this hotel, and, for all I know, you may be fixed so you won't mind your loss as much as I do mine; but it ought to make you kind of charitable toward my suspicions of Madame de Vaurigard's friends."

The six hundred dollars in express company checks and the three hundred-lire bills were all the money the unhappy Mellin had in the world, and until he could return to Cranston and go back to

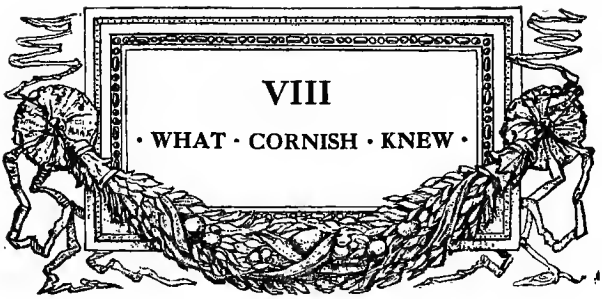
work in the real-estate office again, he had no prospect of any more. He had not even his steamer ticket. In the shock of horror and despair he whispered brokenly:

"I don't care if they 're the worst people in the world, they 're better than I am!"

The other's gloom cleared a little at this. "Well, you *have* got it!" he exclaimed briskly. "You don't know how different you 'll feel after a long walk in the open air." He looked at his watch. "I 've got to go and see what that newspaper-man, Cornish, wants; it 's ten o'clock. I 'll be back after a while; I want to reason this out with you. I don't deny but it 's possible I 'm wrong; anyway, you think it over while I 'm gone.

You take a good hard think, will you?"

As he closed the door, Mellin slowly drew the coverlet over his head. It was as if he covered the face of some one who had just died.



VIII

· WHAT · CORNISH · KNEW ·

Two hours passed before young Cooley returned. He knocked twice without a reply; then he came in.

The coverlet was still over Mellin's head.

"Asleep?" asked Cooley.

"No."

The coverlet was removed by a shaking hand.

"Murder!" exclaimed Cooley sympathetically, at sight of the other's face. "A night off certainly does things to you! Better let me get you some——"

"No. I 'll be all right—after while."

"Then I 'll go right ahead with our little troubles. I 've decided to leave for Paris by the one-thirty and have n't got a whole lot of time. Cornish is here with me in the hall: he 's got something to say that 's important for you to hear, and I 'm goin' to bring him right in." He waved his hand toward the door, which he had left open. "Come along, Cornish. Poor ole Mellin 'll play Du Barry with us and give us a morning leevy while he listens in a bed with a palanquin to it. Now let 's draw up chairs and be sociable."

The journalist came in, smoking a long cigar, and took the chair the youth pushed toward him; but, after a twinkling glance through his big spectacles

at the face on the pillow, he rose and threw the cigar out of the window.

"Go ahead," said Cooley. "I want you to tell him just what you told me, and when you 're through I want to see if he does n't think I 'm Sherlock Holmes' little brother."

"If Mr. Mellin does not feel too ill," said Cornish dryly; "I know how painful such cases sometimes——"

"No." Mellin moistened his parched lips and made a pitiful effort to smile. "I 'll be all right very soon."

"I am very sorry," began the journalist, "that I was n't able to get a few words with Mr. Cooley yesterday evening. Perhaps you noticed that I tried as hard as I could, without using actual force"—he laughed—"to detain him."

"You did your best," agreed Cooley ruefully, "and I did my worst. Nobody ever listens till the next day!"

"Well, I 'm glad no vital damage was done, anyway," said Cornish. "It would have been pretty hard lines if you two young fellows had been *poor* men, but as it is you 're probably none the worse for a lesson like this."

"You seem to think seven thousand dollars is a joke," remarked Cooley.

Cornish laughed again. "You see, it flatters me to think my time was so valuable that a ten minutes' talk with me would have saved so much money."

"I doubt it," said Cooley. "Ten to one we 'd neither of us have believed you—last night!"

"I doubt it, too." Cornish turned to

Mellin. "I hear that you, Mr. Mellin, are still of the opinion that you were dealing with straight people?"

Mellin managed to whisper "Yes."

"Then," said Cornish, "I 'd better tell you just what I know about it, and you can form your own opinion as to whether I *do* know or not. I have been in the newspaper business on this side for fifteen years, and my headquarters are in Paris, where these people are very well known. The man who calls himself 'Chandler Pedlow' was a faro-dealer for Tom Stout in Chicago when Stout's place was broken up, a good many years ago. There was a real Chandler Pedlow in Congress from a California district in the early nineties, but he is dead. This man's name is Ben Welch: he 's a pro-

fessional swindler; and the Englishman, Sneyd, is another; a quiet man, not so well known as Welch, and not nearly so clever, but a good 'feeder' for him. The very attractive Frenchwoman who calls herself 'Comtesse de Vaurigard' is generally believed to be Sneyd's wife, though I could not take the stand on that myself. Welch is the brains of the organization: you might n't think it, but he 's a very brilliant man—he might have made a great reputation in business if he 'd been straight—and, with this woman's help, he 's carried out some really astonishing schemes. His manner is clumsy; *he* knows that, bless you, but it 's the only manner he can manage, and she is so adroit she can sugar-coat even such a pill as that and coax people

to swallow it. I don't know anything about the Italian who is working with them down here. But a gang of the Welch-Vaurigard-Sneyd type has tentacles all over the Continent; such people are in touch with sharpers everywhere, you see."

"Yes," Cooley interpolated, "and with woolly little lambkins, too."

"Well," chuckled Cornish, "that 's the way they make their living, you know."

"Go on and tell him the rest of it," urged Cooley.

"About Lady Mount-Rhyswicke," said Cornish, "it seems strange enough, but she has a perfect right to her name. She is a good deal older than she looks, and I 've heard she used to be remark-

ably beautiful. Her third husband was Lord George Mount-Rhyswicke, a man who 'd been dropped from his clubs, and he deserted her in 1903, but she has not divorced him. It is said that he is somewhere in South America; however, as to that I do not know."

Mr. Cornish put the very slightest possible emphasis on the word "know," and proceeded:

"I 've heard that she is sincerely attached to him and sends him money from time to time, when she has it—though that, too, is third-hand information. She has been *déclassé* ever since her first divorce. That was a 'celebrated case,' and she 's dropped down pretty far in the world, though I judge she 's a good deal the best of this crowd. Ex-

actly what her relations to the others are I don't know, but I imagine that she 's pretty thick with 'em."

"Just a little!" exclaimed Cooley. "She sits behind one of the lambkins and Héléne behind the other while they get their woolly wool clipped. I suppose the two of 'em signaled what was in every hand we held, though I 'm sure they need n't have gone to the trouble! Fact is, I don't see why they bothered about goin' through the form of playin' cards with us at all. They could have taken it away without that! Whee!" Mr. Cooley whistled loud and long. "And there 's loads of wise young men on the ocean now, hurryin' over to take our places in the pens. Well, they can have *mine!* Funny, Mellin: nobody

would come up to you or me in the Grand Central in New York and try to sell us greenbacks just as good as real. But we come over to Europe with our pockets full o' money and start in to see the Big City with Jesse James in a false mustache on one arm, and Lucresha Borgy, under an assumed name, on the other!"

"I am afraid I agree with you," said Cornish; "though I must say that, from all I hear, Madame de Vaurigard might put an atmosphere about a thing which would deceive almost any one who was n't on his guard. When a Parisienne of her sort is clever at all she 's irresistible."

"I believe you," Cooley sighed deeply.

"Yesterday evening, Mr. Mellin," continued the journalist, "when I saw the son of my old friend in company with Welch and Sneyd, of course I tried to warn him. I 've often seen them in Paris, though I believe they have no knowledge of me. As I 've said, they are notorious, especially Welch, yet they have managed, so far, to avoid any difficulty with the Paris police, and, I 'm sorry to say, it might be hard to actually prove anything against them. You could n't *prove* that anything was crooked last night, for instance. For that matter, I don't suppose you want to. Mr. Cooley wishes to accept his loss and bear it, and I take it that that will be your attitude, too. In regard to the note you gave Sneyd, I hope you will refuse

to pay; I don't think that they would dare press the matter."

"Neither do I," Mr. Cooley agreed. "I left a silver cigarette-case at the apartment last night, and after talkin' to Cornish a while ago, I sent my man for it with a note to *her* that 'll make 'em all sit up and take some notice. The gang 's all there together, you can be sure. I asked for Sneyd and Pedlow in the office and found they 'd gone out early this morning leavin' word they would n't be back till midnight. And, see here; I know I 'm easy, but somehow I believe you 're even a softer piece o' meat than I am. I want you to promise me that whatever happens you won't pay that I O U."

Mellin moistened his lips in vain. He could not answer.

"I want you to promise me not to pay it," repeated Cooley earnestly.

"I promise," gasped Mellin.

"You won't pay it no matter what they do?"

"No."

This seemed to reassure Mr. Cooley.

"Well," he said, "I 've got to hustle to get my car shipped and make the train. Cornish has finished his job down here and he 's goin' with me. I want to get out. The whole thing 's left a mighty bad taste in my mouth, and I 'd go crazy if I did n't get away from it. Why don't you jump into your clothes and come along, too?"

"I can't."

"Well," said the young man with a sympathetic shake of the head, "you certainly look sick. It may be better if you stay in bed till evening: a train 's a mighty mean place for the day after. But I would n't hang around here too long. If you want money, all you have to do is to ask the hotel to cash a check on your home bank; they 're always glad to do that for Americans." He turned to the door. "Mr. Cornish, if you 're goin' to help me about shippin' the car, I 'm ready."

"So am I. Good-by, Mr. Mellin."

"Good-by," Mellin said feebly—"and thank you."

Young Cooley came back to the bedside and shook the other's feverish hand. "Good-by, ole man. I 'm awful sorry

it 's all happened, but I 'm glad it did n't cost you quite as much money as it did me. Otherwise I expect it 's hit us about equally hard. I wish—I wish I could find a *nice one*"—the youth gulped over something not unlike a sob—"as fascinatin' as her!"

Most people have had dreams of approaching dangers in the path of which their bodies remained inert; when, in spite of the frantic wish to fly, it was impossible to move, while all the time the horror crept closer and closer. This was Mellin's state as he saw the young man going. It was absolutely necessary to ask Cooley for help, to beg him for a loan. But he could not.

He saw Cooley's hand on the door-knob; saw the door swing open.

"Good-by, again," Cooley said; "and good luck to you!"

Mellin's will strove desperately with the shame that held him silent.

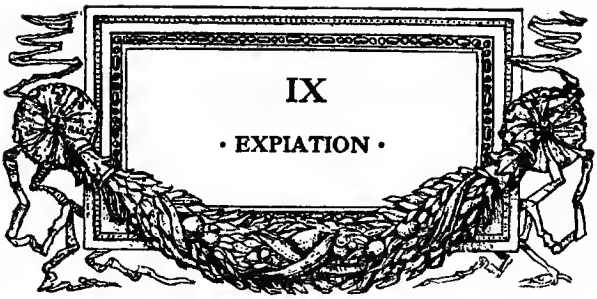
The door was closing.

"Oh, Cooley," called Mellin hoarsely.

"Yes. What?"

"J-j-just good-by," said Mellin.

And with that young Cooley was gone.



IX

· EXPIATION ·

A MULTITUDINOUS clangor of bells and a dozen neighboring chimes rang noon; then the rectangular oblongs of hot sunlight that fell from the windows upon the carpet of Mellin's room began imperceptibly to shift their angles and move eastward. From the stone pavement of the street below came the sound of horses pawing and the voices of waiting cabmen; then bells again, and more bells; clamoring the slow and cruel afternoon into the past. But all was silent in Mellin's

room, save when, from time to time, a long, shuddering sigh came from the bed.

The unhappy young man had again drawn the coverlet over his head, but not to sleep: it was more like a forlorn and desperate effort to hide, as if he crept into a hole, seeking darkness to cover the shame and fear that racked his soul. For though his shame had been too great to let him confess to young Cooley and ask for help, his fear was as great as his shame; and it increased as the hours passed. In truth his case was desperate. Except the people who had stripped him, Cooley was the only person in all of Europe with whom he had more than a very casual acquaintance. At home, in Cranston, he had no friends

susceptible to such an appeal as it was vitally necessary for him to make. His relatives were not numerous: there were two aunts, the widows of his father's brothers, and a number of old-maid cousins; and he had an uncle in Iowa, a country minister whom he had not seen for years. But he could not cable to any of these for money; nor could he quite conjure his imagination into picturing any of them sending it if he did. And even to cable he would have to pawn his watch, which was an old-fashioned one of silver and might not bring enough to pay the charges.

He began to be haunted by fragmentary, prophetic visions—confused but realistic in detail, and horridly probable—of his ejectment from the hotel, per-

haps arrest and trial. He wondered what they did in Italy to people who "beat" hotels; and, remembering what some one had told him of the dreadfulness of Italian jails, convulsive shudderings seized upon him.

The ruddy oblongs of sunlight crawled nearer to the east wall of the room, stretching themselves thinner and thinner, until finally they were not there at all, and the room was left in deepening grayness. Carriages, one after the other, in unintermittent succession, rumbled up to the hotel-entrance beneath the window, bringing goldfish for the aquarium from the music pond on the Pincio and the fountains of Villa Borghese. Wild strains from the Hunga-

rian orchestra, rhapsodical twankings of violins, and the runaway arpeggios of a zither crazed with speed-mania, skipped along the corridors and lightly through Mellin's door. In his mind's eye he saw the gay crowd in the watery light, the little tables where only five days ago he had sat with the loveliest of all the anemone-like ladies. . . .

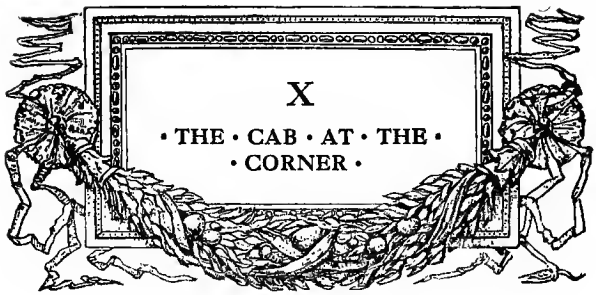
The beautifully-dressed tea-drinkers were there now, under the green glass dome, prattling and smiling, those people he had called his own. And as the music sounded louder, faster, wilder and wilder with the gipsy madness—then in that darkening bedchamber his soul became articulate in a cry of humiliation:

"God in His mercy forgive me, how raw I was!"

A VISION came before his closed eyes; the maple-bordered street in Cranston, the long, straight, wide street where Mary Kramer lived; a summer twilight; Mary in her white muslin dress on the veranda steps, and a wistaria vine climbing the post beside her, half-embowering her. How cool and sweet and good she looked! How dear—and how *kind!*—she had always been to him.

DUSK stole through the windows: the music ceased and the tea-hour was over. The carriages were departing, bearing the gay people who went away laughing, calling last words to one another,

and, naturally, quite unaware that a young man, who, five days before, had adopted them and called them "his own," was lying in a darkened room above them, and crying like a child upon his pillow.



At ten o'clock, a page bearing a card upon a silver tray knocked upon the door, and stared with wide-eyed astonishment at the disordered gentleman who opened it.

The card was Lady Mount-Rhyswicke's. Underneath the name was written:

If you are there will you give me a few minutes? I am waiting in a cab at the next corner by the fountain.

Mellin's hand shook as he read. He

did not doubt that she came as an emissary; probably they meant to hound him for payment of the note he had given Sneyd, and at that thought he could have shrieked with hysterical laughter.

"Do you speak English?" he asked.

"Spik little. Yes."

"Who gave you this card?"

"Coachman," said the boy. "He wait risposta."

"Tell him to say that I shall be there in five minutes."

"Fi' minute. Yes. Good-by."

Mellin was partly dressed—he had risen half an hour earlier and had been distractedly pacing the floor when the page knocked—and he completed his toilet quickly. He passed down the corridors, descended by the stairway (feel-

ing that to use the elevator would be another abuse of the confidence of the hotel company) and slunk across the lobby with the look and the sensations of a tramp who knows that he will be kicked into the street if anybody catches sight of him.

A closed cab stood near the fountain at the next corner. There was a trunk on the box by the driver, and the roof was piled with bags and rugs. He approached uncertainly.

"Is—is this—is it Lady Mount-Rhyswicke?" he stammered pitifully.

She opened the door.

"Yes. Will you get in? We 'll just drive round the block if you don't mind. I 'll bring you back here in ten minutes." And when he had tremulously complied,

"*Avanti, cocchiere,*" she called to the driver, and the tired little cab-horse began to draw them slowly along the deserted street.

Lady Mount-Rhyswicke maintained silence for a time, while her companion waited, his heart pounding with dreadful apprehensions. Finally she gave a short, hard laugh and said:

"I saw your face by the corner light. Been havin' a hard day of it?"

The fear of breaking down kept him from answering. He gulped painfully once or twice, and turned his face away from her. Light enough from a street-lamp shone in for her to see.

"I was rather afraid you 'd refuse," she said seriously. "Really, I wonder you were willin' to come!"

"I was—I was afraid not to." He choked out the confession with the recklessness of final despair.

"So?" she said, with another short laugh. Then she resumed her even, tired monotone: "Your little friend Cooley's note this morning gave us all a rather fair notion as to what you must be thinkin' of us. He seems to have found a sort of walkin' 'Who's-Who-on-the-Continent' since last night. Pity for some people he did n't find it before! I don't think I 'm sympathetic with your little Cooley. I 'guess,' as you Yankees say, 'he can stand it.' But"—her voice suddenly became louder—"I 'm not in the business of robbin' babies and orphans, no, my dear friends, nor of helpin' anybody else to rob them either!—Here you are!"

She thrust into his hand a small packet, securely wrapped in paper and fastened with rubber bands. "There 's your block of express checks for six hundred dollars and your I O U to Sneyd with it. Take better care of it next time."

He had been tremulous enough, but at that his whole body began to shake violently.

"*What!*" he quavered.

"I say, take better care of it next time," she said, dropping again into her monotone. "I did n't have such an easy time gettin' it back from them as you might think. I 've got rather a sore wrist, in fact."

She paused at an inarticulate sound from him.

"Oh, that 's soon mended," she laughed drearily. "The truth is, it 's been a good thing for me—your turning up. They 're gettin' in too deep water for me, Héléne and her friends, and I 've broken with the lot, or they 've broken with me, whichever it is. We could n't hang together after the fightin' we 've done to-day. I had to do a lot of threatenin' and things. Welch was ugly, so I had to be ugly too. Never mind"—she checked an uncertain effort of his to speak—"I saw what you were like, soon as we sat down at the table last night—how new you were and all that. It needed only a glance to see that Héléne had made a mistake about you. She 'd got a notion you were a millionaire like the little Cooley, but I knew better from

your talk. She 's clever, but she 's French, and she can't get it out of her head that you could be an American and not a millionaire. Of course, they *all* knew better when you brought out your express checks and talked like somebody in one of the old-time story-books about 'debts of honor.' Even Héléne understood then that the express checks were all you had." She laughed. "I did n't have any trouble gettin' the *note* back!"

She paused again for a moment, then resumed: "There is n't much use our goin' over it all, but I want you to know one thing. Your little friend Cooley made it rather clear that he accused Héléne and me of signalin'. Well, *I* did n't. Perhaps that 's the reason you did n't lose as much as he did; I can't

say. And one thing more: all this is n't goin' to do you any harm. I 'm not very keen about philosophy and religion and that, but I believe if you 're let in for a lot of trouble, and it only *half* kills you, you can get some good of it."

"Do you think," he stammered—"do you think I 'm worth saving?"

She smiled faintly and said:

"You 've probably got a sweetheart in the States somewhere—a nice girl, a pretty young thing who goes to church and thinks you 're a great man, perhaps? Is it so?"

"I am not worthy," he began, choked suddenly, then finished—"to breathe the same air!"

"That 's quite right," Lady Mount-Rhyswicke assured him. "Think what

you 'd think of her if she 'd got herself into the same sort of scrape by doin' the things you 've been doin'! And remember *that* if you ever feel impatient with her, or have any temptations to superiority in times to come. And yet"—for the moment she spoke earnestly—"you go back to your little girl, but don't you tell her a word of this. You could n't even tell her that meetin' you has helped me, because she would n't understand."

"Nor do I. I can't."

"Oh, it 's simple. I saw that if I was gettin' down to where I was robbin' babies and orphans . . ." The cab halted. "Here 's your corner. I told him only to go round the block and come back. Good-by. I 'm off for Amalfi. It 's a good place to rest."

He got out dazedly, and the driver cracked his whip over the little horse; but Mellin lifted a detaining hand.

"*A spet*'," called Lady Mount-Rhyswicke to the driver. "What is it, Mr. Mellin?"

"I can't—I can't look you in the face," he stammered, his attitude perfectly corroborative of his words. "I would—oh, I would kneel in the dust here before you——"

"Some of the poetry you told me you write?"

"I 've never written any poetry," he said, not looking up. "Perhaps I can—now. What I want to say is—I 'm so ashamed of it—I don't know how to get the words out, but I must. I may never see you again, and I must. I 'm sorry—

please try to forgive me—I was n't myself when I did it——"

"Blurt it out; that 's the best way."

"I 'm sorry," he floundered—"I 'm sorry I kissed you."

She laughed her tired laugh and said in her tired voice the last words he was ever destined to hear from her:

"Oh, I don't mind, if you don't. It was so innocent, it was what decided me."

One of the hundreds of good saints that belong to Rome must have overheard her and pitied the young man, for it is ascribable only to some such special act of mercy that Mellin understood (and he did) exactly what she meant.

(THE END)

PART II.

MRS. PROTHEROE

WHEN Alonzo Rawson took his seat as the Senator from Stackpole in the upper branch of the General Assembly of the State, an expression of pleasure and of greatness appeared to be permanently imprinted upon his countenance. He felt that if he had not quite arrived at all which he meant to make his own, at least he had emerged upon the arena where he was to win it, and he looked about him for a few other strong spirits with whom to construct a focus of power which should control the senate. The young man had not long to look, for within a week after the beginning of the session these others showed themselves to his view, rising above the general level of mediocrity and timidity, party-leaders and chiefs of faction, men who were on their feet continually, speaking half-a-dozen times a day, freely and loudly. To

these, and that house at large, he felt it necessary to introduce himself by a speech which must prove him one of the elect, and he awaited impatiently an opening.

Alonzo had no timidity himself. He was not one of those who first try their voices on motions to adjourn, written in form and handed out to novices by presiding officers and leaders. He was too conscious of his own gifts, and he had been "accustomed to speaking" ever since his days in the Stackpole City Seminary. He was under the impression, also, that his appearance alone would command attention from his colleagues and the gallery. He was tall; his hair was long, with a rich waviness, rippling over both brow and collar, and he had, by years of endeavour, succeeded in moulding his features to present an aspect of stern and thoughtful majesty whenever he "spoke."

The opportunity to show his fellows that new greatness was among them delayed not overlong, and Senator Rawson arose, long and bony in his best clothes, to address the senate with a

huge voice in denunciation of the "Sunday Baseball Bill," then upon second reading. The classical references, which, as a born orator, he felt it necessary to introduce, were received with acclamations which the gavel of the Lieutenant-Governor had no power to still.

"What led to the De-cline and Fall of the Roman Empire?" he exclaimed. "I await an answer from the advocates of this *de*-generate measure! I *demand* an answer from them! Let me hear from them on *that* subject! Why don't they speak up? They can't give one. Not because they ain't familiar with history, no sir! That's not the reason! It's because they *daren't*, because their answer would have to go on record *against* 'em! Don't any of you try to raise it against me that I ain't speakin' to the point, for I tell you that when you encourage Sunday Baseball, or any kind of Sabbath-breakin' on Sunday, you're tryin' to start this State on the downward path that beset Rome! *I'll* tell you what ruined it. The Roman Empire started out to be the greatest nation on earth, and they had a good start, too,

just like the United States has got to-day. *Then* what happened to 'em? Why, them old ancient fellers got more interested in athletic games and gladiatorial combats and racing and all kinds of out-door sports, and bettin' on 'em, than they were in oratory, or literature, or charitable institutions and good works of all kinds! At first they were moderate and the country was prosperous. But six days in the week wouldn't content 'em, and they went at it all the time, so that at last they gave up the seventh day to their sports, the way this bill wants *us* to do, and from that time on the result was *de*-generacy and *de*-gredation! You better remember *that* lesson, my friends, and don't try to sink this State to the level of Rome!"

When Alonzo Rawson wiped his dampened brow, and dropped into his chair, he was satisfied to the core of his heart with the effect of his maiden effort. There was not one eye in the place that was not fixed upon him and shining with surprise and delight, while the kindly Lieutenant-Governor, his face very red, rapped for order.

The young senator across the aisle leaned over and shook Alonzo's hand excitedly.

"That was beautiful, Senator Rawson!" he whispered. "I'm *for* the bill, but I can respect a masterly opponent."

"I thank you, Senator Truslow," Alonzo returned graciously. "I am glad to have your good opinion, Senator."

"You have it, Senator," said Truslow enthusiastically. "I hope you intend to speak often?"

"I do, Senator. I intend to make myself heard," the other answered gravely, "upon all questions of moment."

"You will fill a great place among us, Senator!"

Then Alonzo Rawson wondered if he had not underestimated his neighbour across the aisle; he had formed an opinion of Truslow as one of small account and no power, for he had observed that, although this was Truslow's second term, he had not once demanded recognition nor attempted to take part in a debate. Instead, he seemed to spend most of his

time frittering over some desk work, though now and then he walked up and down the aisles talking in a low voice to various senators. How such a man could have been elected at all, Alonzo failed to understand. Also, Truslow was physically inconsequent, in his colleague's estimation —"a little insignificant, dudish kind of a man," he had thought; one whom he would have darkly suspected of cigarettes had he not been dumbfounded to behold Truslow smoking an old black pipe in the lobby. The Senator from Stackpole had looked over the other's clothes with a disapproval that amounted to bitterness. Truslow's attire reminded him of pictures in New York magazines, or the dress of boys newly home from college, he didn't know which, but he did know that it was contemptible. Consequently, after receiving the young man's congratulations, Alonzo was conscious of the keenest surprise at his own feeling that there might be something in him after all.

He decided to look him over again, more carefully to take the measure of one who had shown

himself so frankly an admirer. Waiting, therefore, a few moments until he felt sure that Truslow's gaze had ceased to rest upon himself, he turned to bend a surreptitious but piercing scrutiny upon his neighbour. His glance, however, sweeping across Truslow's shoulder toward the face, suddenly encountered another pair of eyes beyond, so intently fixed upon himself that he started. The clash was like two search-lights meeting — and the glorious brown eyes that shot into Alonzo's were not the eyes of Truslow.

Truslow's desk was upon the outer aisle, and along the wall were placed comfortable leather chairs and settees, originally intended for the use of members of the upper house, but nearly always occupied by their wives and daughters, or "lady-lobbyists," or other women spectators. Leaning back with extraordinary grace, in the chair nearest Truslow, sat the handsomest woman Alonzo had ever seen in his life. Her long coat of soft grey fur was unrecognizable to him in connection with any familiar breed of squirrel; her broad flat hat of the same fur was wound with a grey

veil, underneath which her heavy brown hair seemed to exhale a mysterious glow, and never, not even in a lithograph, had he seen features so regular or a skin so clear! And to look into her eyes seemed to Alonzo like diving deep into clear water and turning to stare up at the light.

His own eyes fell first. In the breathless awkwardness that beset him they seemed to stumble shamefully down to his desk, like a country-boy getting back to his seat after a thrashing on the teacher's platform. For the lady's gaze, profoundly liquid as it was, had not been friendly.

Alonzo Rawson had neither the habit of petty analysis, nor the inclination toward it; yet there arose within him a wonder at his own emotion, at its strangeness and the violent reaction of it. A moment ago his soul had been steeped in satisfaction over the figure he had cut with his speech and the extreme enthusiasm which had been accorded it — an extraordinarily pleasant feeling: suddenly this was gone, and in its place he found himself almost choking with a dazed sense of having been scathed, and at the same

time understood in a way in which he did not understand himself. And yet — he and this most unusual lady had been so mutually conscious of each other in their mysterious interchange that he felt almost acquainted with her. Why, then, should his head be hot with resentment? Nobody had *said* anything to him!

He seized upon the fattest of the expensive books supplied to him by the State, opened it with emphasis and began not to read it, with abysmal abstraction, tinglingly alert to the circumstance that Truslow was holding a low-toned but lively conversation with the unknown. Her laugh came to him, at once musical, quiet, and of a quality which irritated him into saying bitterly to himself that he guessed there was just as much refinement in Stackpole as there was in the Capital City, and just as many old families! The clerk calling his vote upon the "Baseball Bill" at that moment, he roared "No!" in a tone which was profane. It seemed to him that he was avenging himself upon somebody for something and it gave him a great deal of satisfaction.

He returned immediately to his imitation of Archimedes, only relaxing the intensity of his attention to the text (which blurred into jargon before his fixed gaze) when he heard that light laugh again. He pursed his lips, looked up at the ceiling as if slightly puzzled by some profound question beyond the reach of womankind; solved it almost immediately, and, setting his hand to pen and paper, wrote the capital letter "O" several hundred times on note-paper furnished by the State. So oblivious was he, apparently, to everything but the question of statecraft which occupied him, that he did not even look up when the morning's session was adjourned and the lawmakers began to pass noisily out, until Truslow stretched an arm across the aisle and touched him upon the shoulder.

"In a moment, Senator!" answered Alonzo in his deepest chest tones. He made it a very short moment, indeed, for he had a wild, breath-taking suspicion of what was coming.

"I want you to meet Mrs. Protheroe, Senator," said Truslow, rising, as Rawson, after folding

his writings with infinite care, placed them in his breast pocket.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'am," Alonzo said in a loud, firm voice, as he got to his feet, though the place grew vague about him when the lady stretched a charming, slender, gloved hand to him across Truslow's desk. He gave it several solemn shakes.

"We shouldn't have disturbed you, perhaps?" she asked, smiling radiantly upon him. "You were at some important work, I'm afraid."

He met her eyes again, and their beauty and the thoughtful kindliness of them fairly took his breath. "I am the chairman, ma'am," he replied, swallowing, "of the committee on drains and dikes."

"I knew it was something of great moment," she said gravely, "but I was anxious to tell you that I was interested in your speech."

A few minutes later, without knowing how he had got his hat and coat from the cloak-room, Alonzo Rawson found himself walking slowly through the marble vistas of the State house to

the great outer doors with the lady and Truslow. They were talking inconsequently of the weather, and of various legislators, but Alonzo did not know it. He vaguely formed replies to her questions and he hardly realized what the questions were; he was too stirringly conscious of the rich quiet of her voice and of the caress of the grey fur of her cloak when the back of his hand touched it — rather accidentally — now and then, as they moved on together.

It was a cold, quick air to which they emerged and Alonzo, daring to look at her, found that she had pulled the veil down over her face, the colour of which, in the keen wind, was like that of June roses seen through morning mists. At the curb a long, low, rakish black motor-car was in waiting, the driver a mere swaddled cylinder of fur.

Truslow, opening the little door of the tonneau, offered his hand to the lady. "Come over to the club, Senator, and lunch with me," he said. "Mrs. Protheroe won't mind dropping us there on her way."

That was an eerie ride for Alonzo, whose feet were falling upon strange places. His pulses jumped and his eyes swam with the tears of unlawful speed, but his big ungloved hand tingled not with the cold so much as with the touch of that divine grey fur upon his little finger.

"You intend to make many speeches, Mr. Truslow tells me," he heard the rich voice saying.

"Yes ma'am," he summoned himself to answer. "I expect I will. Yes ma'am." He paused, and then repeated, "Yes ma'am."

She looked at him for a moment. "But you will do some work, too, won't you?" she asked slowly.

Her intention in this passed by Alonzo at the time. "Yes ma'am," he answered. "The committee work interests me greatly, especially drains and dikes."

"I have heard," she said, as if searching his opinion, "that almost as much is accomplished in the committee-rooms as on the floor? There — and in the lobby and in the hotels and clubs?"

"I don't have much to do with that!" he returned quickly. "I guess none of them lobbyists will get much out of me! I even sent back all their railroad tickets. They needn't come near me!"

After a pause which she may have filled with unexpressed admiration, she ventured, almost timidly: "Do you remember that it was said that Napoleon once attributed the secret of his power over other men to one quality?"

"I am an admirer of Napoleon," returned the Senator from Stackpole. "I admire all great men."

"He said that he held men by his reserve."

"It can be done," observed Alonzo, and stopped, feeling that it was more reserved to add nothing to the sentence.

"But I suppose that such a policy," she smiled upon him inquiringly, "wouldn't have helped him much with women?"

"No," he agreed immediately. "My opinion is that a man ought to tell a *good* woman everything. What is more sacred than —"

The car, turning a corner much too quickly,

performed a gymnastic squirm about an unexpected street-car and the speech ended in a gasp, as Alonzo, not of his own volition, half rose and pressed his cheek closely against hers. Instantaneous as it was, his heart leaped violently, but not with fear. Could all the things of his life that had seemed beautiful have been compressed into one instant, it would not have brought him even the suggestion of the wild shock of joy of that one, wherein he knew the glamorous perfume of Mrs. Protheroe's brown hair and felt her cold cheek firm against his, with only the grey veil between.

"I'm afraid this driver of mine will kill me some day," she said, laughing and composedly straightening her hat. "Do you care for big machines?"

"Yes ma'am," he answered huskily. "I haven't been in many."

"Then I'll take you again," said Mrs. Protheroe. "If you like I'll come down to the State house and take you out for a run in the country."

"When?" said the lost young man, staring at her with his mouth open. "When?"

"Saturday afternoon if you like. I'll be there at two."

They were in front of the club and Truslow had already jumped out. Mrs. Protheroe gave him her hand and they exchanged a glance significant of something more than a friendly good-bye. Indeed, one might have hazarded that there was something almost businesslike about it. The confused Senator from Stackpole, climbing out reluctantly, observed it not, nor could he have understood, even if he had seen, that delicate signal which passed between his two companions.

When he was upon the ground Mrs. Protheroe extended her hand without speaking, but her lips formed the word, "Saturday." Then she was carried away quickly, while Alonzo, his heart hammering, stood looking after her, born into a strange world, the touch of the grey fur upon his little finger, the odour of her hair faintly about him, one side of his face red, the other pale.

"To-day is Wednesday," he said, half aloud.

"Come on, Senator." Truslow took his arm and turned him toward the club doors.

The other looked upon his new friend vaguely. "Why, I forgot to thank her for the ride," he exclaimed.

"You'll have other chances, Senator," Truslow assured him. "Mrs. Protheroe has a hobby for studying politics and she expects to come down often. She has plenty of time — she's a widow, you know."

"I hope you didn't think," responded Alonzo indignantly, "that I thought she was a married woman!"

After lunch they walked back to the State house together, Truslow regarding his thoughtful companion with sidelong whimsicalness. Mrs. Protheroe's question, suggestive of a difference between work and speechmaking, had recurred to Alonzo, and he had determined to make himself felt, off the floor as well as upon it. He set to this with a fine energy, that afternoon, in his committee-room, and the Senator from Stackpole knew his subject. On drains and dikes he had no equal. He spoke convincingly to his colleagues of the committee upon every bill that

was before them, and he compelled their humblest respect. He went earnestly at it, indeed, and sat very late that night, in his room at a near-by boarding house, studying bills, trying to keep his mind upon them and not to think of his strange morning and of Saturday. Finally his neighbour in the next room, Senator Ezra Trumbull, long abed, was awakened by his praying and groaned slightly. Trumbull meant to speak to Rawson about his prayers, for Trumbull was an early one to bed and they woke him every night. The partition was flimsy and Alonzo addressed his Maker in the loud voice of one accustomed to talking across wide out-of-door spaces. Trumbull considered it especially unnecessary in the city; though, as a citizen of a county which loved but little his neighbour's district, he felt that in Stackpole there was good reason for a person to shout his prayers at the top of his voice and even then have small chance to carry through the distance. Still, it was a delicate matter to mention and he put it off from day to day.

Thursday passed slowly for Alonzo Rawson,

nor was his voice lifted in debate. There was little but routine; and the main interest of the chamber was in the lobbying that was being done upon the "Sunday Baseball Bill" which had passed to its third reading and would come up for final disposition within a fortnight. This was the measure which Alonzo had set his heart upon defeating. It was a simple enough bill: it provided, in substance, that baseball might be played on Sunday by professionals in the State capital, which was proud of its league team. Naturally, it was denounced by clergymen, and deputations of ministers and committees from women's religious societies were constantly arriving at the State house to protest against its passage. The Senator from Stackpole reassured all of these with whom he talked, and was one of their staunchest allies and supporters. He was active in leading the wavering among his colleagues, or even the inimical, out to meet and face the deputations. It was in this occupation that he was engaged, on Friday afternoon, when he received a shock.

A committee of women from a church society was waiting in the corridor, and he had rounded-up a reluctant half-dozen senators and led them forth to be interrogated as to their intentions regarding the bill. The committee and the law-makers soon distributed themselves into little argumentative clumps, and Alonzo found himself in the centre of these, with one of the ladies who had unfortunately — but, in her enthusiasm, without misgivings — begun a reproachful appeal to an advocate of the bill whose name was Goldstein.

"Senator Goldstein," she exclaimed, "I could not believe it when I heard that you were in favour of this measure! I have heard my husband speak in the highest terms of your old father. May I ask you what *he* thinks of it? If you voted for the desecration of Sunday by a low baseball game, could you dare go home and face that good old man?"

"Yes, madam," said Goldstein mildly; "we are *both* Jews."

A low laugh rippled out from near-by, and

Alonzo, turning almost violently, beheld his lady of the furs. She was leaning back against a broad pilaster, her hands sweeping the same big coat behind her, her face turned toward him, but her eyes, sparklingly delighted, resting upon Goldstein. Under the broad fur hat she made a picture as enraging, to Alonzo Rawson, as it was bewitching. She appeared not to see him, to be quite unconscious of him — and he believed it. Truslow and five or six members of both houses were about her, and they all seemed to be bending eagerly toward her. Alonzo was furious with her.

Her laugh lingered upon the air for a moment, then her glance swept round the other way, omitting the Senator from Stackpole, who, immediately putting into practice a reserve which would have astonished Napoleon, swung about and quitted the deputation without a word of farewell or explanation. He turned into the cloakroom and paced the floor for three minutes with a malevolence which awed the coloured attendants into not brushing his coat; but, when he returned to the corridor, cautious inquiries ad-

dressed to the tobacconist, elicited the information that the handsome lady with Senator Truslow had departed.

Truslow himself had not gone. He was lounging in his seat when Alonzo returned and was genially talkative. The latter refrained from replying in kind, not altogether out of reserve, but more because of a dim suspicion (which rose within him, the third time Truslow called him "Senator" in one sentence) that his first opinion of the young man as a light-minded person might have been correct.

There was no session the following afternoon, but Alonzo watched the street from the windows of his committee-room, which overlooked the splendid breadth of stone steps leading down from the great doors to the pavement. There were some big bookcases in the room, whose glass doors served as mirrors in which he more and more sternly regarded the soft image of an entirely new grey satin tie, while the conviction grew within him that (arguing from her behaviour of the previous day) she would not come, and that

the Stackpole girls were nobler by far at heart than many who might wear a king's-ransom's-worth of jewels round their throats at the opera-house in a large city. This sentiment was heartily confirmed by the clock when it marked half-past two. He faced the bookcase doors and struck his breast, his open hand falling across the grey tie with tragic violence; after which, turning for the last time to the windows, he uttered a loud exclamation and, laying hands upon an ulster and a grey felt hat, each as new as the satin tie, ran hurriedly from the room. The black automobile was waiting.

"I thought it possible you might see me from a window," said Mrs. Protheroe as he opened the little door.

"I was just coming out," he returned, gasping for breath. "I thought — from yesterday — you'd probably forgotten."

"Why 'from yesterday'?" she asked.

"I thought — I thought —" He faltered to a stop as the full, glorious sense of her presence overcame him. She wore the same veil.

"You thought I did not see you yesterday in the corridor?"

"I thought you might have acted more — more —"

"More cordially?"

"Well," he said, looking down at his hands, "more like you knew we'd been introduced."

At that she sat silent, looking away from him, and he, daring a quick glance at her, found that he might let his eyes remain upon her face. That was a dangerous place for eyes to rest, yet Alonzo Rawson was anxious for the risk. The car flew along the even asphalt on its way to the country like a wild goose on a long slant of wind, and, with his foolish fury melted inexplicably into honey, Alonzo looked at her — and looked at her — till he would have given an arm for another quick corner and a street-car to send his cheek against that veiled, cold cheek of hers again. It was not until they reached the alternate vacant lots and bleak Queen Anne cottages of the city's ragged edge that she broke the silence.

"You were talking to some one else," she said almost inaudibly.

"Yes ma'am, Goldstein, but —"

"Oh, no!" She turned toward him, lifting her hand. "You were quite the lion among ladies."

"I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Protheroe," he said, truthfully.

"What were you talking to all those women about?"

"It was about the 'Sunday Baseball Bill.'"

"Ah! The bill you attacked in your speech, last Wednesday?"

"Yes ma'am."

"I hear you haven't made any speeches since then," she said indifferently.

"No ma'am," he answered gently. "I kind of got the idea that I'd better lay low for a while, at first, and get in some quiet hard work."

"I understand. You are a man of intensely reserved nature."

"With men," said Alonzo, "I am. With ladies I am not so much so. I think a good woman ought to be told —"

"But you are interested," she interrupted, "in defeating that bill?"

"Yes ma'am," he returned. "It is an iniquitous measure."

"Why?"

"Mrs. Protheroe!" he exclaimed, taken aback. "I thought all the ladies were against it. My own mother wrote to me from Stackpole that she'd rather see me in my grave than votin' for such a bill, and I'd rather see myself there!"

"But are you sure that you understand it?"

"I only know it desecrates the Sabbath. That's enough for me!"

She leaned toward him and his breath came quickly.

"No. You're wrong," she said, and rested the tips of her fingers upon his sleeve.

"I don't understand why — why you say that," he faltered. "It sounds kind of — surprising to me —"

"Listen," she said. "Perhaps Mr. Truslow told you that I am studying such things. I do not want to be an idle woman; I want to be of use

to the world, even if it must be only in small ways."

"I think that is a noble ambition!" he exclaimed. "I think all good women ought —"

"Wait," she interrupted gently. "Now, that bill is a worthy one, though it astonishes you to hear me say so. Perhaps you don't understand the conditions. Sunday is the labouring-man's only day of recreation — and what recreation is he offered?"

"He ought to go to church," said Alonzo promptly.

"But the fact is that he doesn't — not often — not at *all* in the afternoon. Wouldn't it be well to give him some wholesome way of employing his Sunday afternoons? This bill provides for just that, and it keeps him away from drinking too, for it forbids the sale of liquor on the grounds."

"Yes, I know," said Alonzo plaintively. "But it ain't *right!* I was raised to respect the Sabbath and —"

"Ah, that's what you should do! You think *I*

could believe in anything that wouldn't make it better and more sacred?"

"Oh, no, ma'am!" he cried reproachfully. "It's only that I don't see —"

"I am telling you." She lifted her veil and let him have the full dazzle of her beauty. "Do you know that many thousands of labouring people spend their Sundays drinking and carousing about the low country road-houses because the game is played at such places on Sunday? They go there because they never get a chance to see it played in the city. And don't you understand that there would be no Sunday liquor trade, no working-men poisoning themselves every seventh day in the low groggeries, as hundreds of them do now, if they had something to see that would interest them? — something as wholesome and fine as this sport would be, under the conditions of this bill; something to keep them in the open air, something to bring a little gaiety into their dull lives!" Her voice had grown louder and it shook a little, with a rising emotion, though its sweetness was only the more poignant. "Oh, my

dear Senator," she cried, "don't you *see* how wrong you are? Don't you want to *help* these poor people?"

Her fingers, which had tightened upon his sleeve, relaxed and she leaned back, pulling the veil down over her face as if wishing to conceal from him that her lips trembled slightly; then resting her arm upon the leather cushions, she turned her head away from him, staring fixedly into the gaunt beech woods lining the country road along which they were now coursing. For a time she heard nothing from him, and the only sound was the monotonous chug of the machine.

"I suppose you think it rather shocking to hear a woman talking practically of such commonplace things," she said at last, in a cold voice, just loud enough to be heard.

"No ma'am," he said huskily.

"Then what *do* you think?" she cried, turning toward him again with a quick imperious gesture.

"I think I'd better go back to Stackpole," he answered very slowly, "and resign my job. I don't see as I've got any business in the Legislature."

"I don't understand you."

He shook his head mournfully. "It's a simple enough matter. I've studied out a good many bills and talked 'em over and I've picked up some influence and — "

"I know you have." she interrupted eagerly. "Mr. Truslow says that the members of your drains and dikes committee follow your vote on every bill."

"Yes ma'am," said Alonzo Rawson meekly, "but I expect they oughtn't to. I've had a lesson this afternoon."

"You mean to say — "

"I mean that I didn't know what I was doing about that baseball bill. I was just pig-headedly goin' ahead against it, not knowing nothing about the conditions, and it took a lady to show me what they were. I would have done a wrong thing if you hadn't stopped me."

"You mean," she cried, her splendid eyes widening with excitement and delight; "you mean that you — that you — "

"I mean that I will vote for the bill!" He

struck his clenched fist upon his knee. "I come to the Legislature to do *right!*"

"You will, ah, you *will* do right in this!" Mrs. Protheroe thrust up her veil again and her face was flushed and radiant with triumph. "And you'll work, and you'll make a speech for the bill?"

At this the righteous exaltation began rather abruptly to simmer down in the soul of Alonzo Rawson. He saw the consequences of too violently reversing, and knew how difficult they might be to face.

"Well, not — not exactly," he said weakly. "I expect our best plan would be for me to lay kind of low and not say any more about the bill at all. Of course, I'll quit workin' against it; and on the roll-call I'll edge up close to the clerk and say 'Aye' so that only him'll hear me. That's done every day — and I — well, I don't just exactly like to come out too publicly for it, after my speech and all I've done against it."

She looked at him sharply for a short second,

and then offered him her hand and said: "Let's shake hands *now*, on the vote. Think what a triumph it is for me to know that I helped to show you the right."

"Yes ma'am," he answered confusedly, too much occupied with shaking her hand to know what he said. She spoke one word in an undertone to the driver and the machine took the very shortest way back to the city.

After this excursion, several days passed, before Mrs. Protheroe came to the State house again. Rawson was bending over the desk of Senator Josephus Battle, the white-bearded leader of the opposition to the "Sunday Baseball Bill," and was explaining to him the intricacies of a certain drainage measure, when Battle, whose attention had wandered, plucked his sleeve and whispered:

"If you want to see a mighty pretty woman that's doin' no good here, look behind you, over there in the chair by the big fireplace at the back of the room."

Alonzo looked.

It was she whose counterpart had been in his dream's eye every moment of the dragging days which had been vacant of her living presence. A number of his colleagues were hanging over her almost idiotically; her face was gay and her voice came to his ears, as he turned, with the accent of her cadenced laughter running through her talk like a chime of tiny bells flitting through a strain of music.

"This is the third time she's been here," said Battle, rubbing his beard the wrong way. "She's lobbyin' for that infernal Sabbath-Desecration bill, but we'll beat her, my son."

"Have you made her acquaintance, Senator?" asked Alonzo stiffly.

"No, sir, and I don't want to. But I knew her father — the slickest old beat and the smoothest talker that ever waltzed up the pike. She married rich; her husband left her a lot of real estate around here, but she spends most of her time away. Whatever struck her to come down and lobby for that bill I don't know *yet* — but I will! Truslow's helping her to help himself; he's

got stock in the company that runs the baseball team, but what she's up to — well, I'll bet there's a nigger in the woodpile *some*where!"

"I expect there's a lot of talk like that!" said Alonzo, red with anger, and taking up his papers abruptly.

"Yes, *sir!*" said Battle emphatically, utterly misunderstanding the other's tone and manner. "Don't you worry, my son. We'll kill that venomous bill right here in this chamber! We'll kill it so dead that it won't make one flop after the axe hits it. You and me and some others'll tend to *that!* Let her work that pretty face and those eyes of hers all she wants to! I'm keepin' a little lookout, too — and I'll — "

He broke off, for the angry and perturbed Alonzo had left him and gone to his own desk. Battle, slightly surprised, rubbed his beard the wrong way and sauntered out to the lobby to muse over a cigar. Alonzo, loathing Battle with a great loathing, formed bitter phrases concerning that vicious-minded old gentleman, while for a moment he affected to be setting his desk in or-

der. Then he walked slowly up the aisle, conscious of a roaring in his ears (though not aware how red they were) as he approached the semicircle about her.

He paused within three feet of her in a sudden panic of timidity, and then, to his consternation, she looked him squarely in the face, over the shoulders of two of the group, and the only sign of recognition that she exhibited was a slight frown of unmistakable repulsion, which appeared between her handsome eyebrows.

It was very swift; only Alonzo saw it; the others had no eyes for anything but her, and were not aware of his presence behind them, for she did not even pause in what she was saying.

Alonzo walked slowly away with the wormwood in his heart. He had not grown up among the young people of Stackpole without similar experiences, but it had been his youthful boast that no girl had ever "stopped speaking" to him without reason, or "cut a dance" with him and afterward found opportunity to repeat the indignity.

"What have I *done* to *her?*" was perhaps the hottest cry of his soul, for the mystery was as great as the sting of it.

It was no balm upon that sting to see her pass him at the top of the outer steps, half an hour later, on the arm of that one of his colleagues who had been called the "best-dressed man in the Legislature." She swept by him without a sign, laughing that same laugh at some sally of her escort, and they got into the black automobile together and were whirled away and out of sight by the impassive bundle of furs that manipulated the wheel.

For the rest of that afternoon and the whole of that night no man, woman, or child heard the voice of Alonzo Rawson, for he spoke to none. He came not to the evening meal, nor was he seen by any who had his acquaintance. He entered his room at about midnight, and Trumbull was awakened by his neighbour's overturning a chair. No match was struck, however, and Trumbull was relieved to think that the Senator from Stackpole intended going directly to bed without

troubling to light the gas, and that his prayers would soon be over. Such was not the case, for no other sound came from the room, nor were Alonzo's prayers uttered that night, though the unhappy statesman in the next apartment could not get to sleep for several hours on account of his nervous expectancy of them.

After this, as the day approached upon which hung the fate of the bill which Mr. Josephus Battle was fighting, Mrs. Protheroe came to the Senate Chamber nearly every morning and afternoon. Not once did she appear to be conscious of Alonzo Rawson's presence, nor once did he allow his eyes to delay upon her, though it cannot be truthfully said that he did not always know when she came, when she left, and with whom she stood or sat or talked. He evaded all mention or discussion of the bill or of Mrs. Protheroe; avoided Truslow (who, strangely enough, was avoiding *him*) and, spending upon drains and dikes all the energy that he could manage to concentrate, burned the midnight oil and rubbed salt into his wounds to such marked effect that by the evening of the

Governor's Reception — upon the morning following which the mooted bill was to come up — he offered an impression so haggard and worn that an actor might have studied him for a make-up as a young statesman going into a decline.

Nevertheless, he dressed with great care and bitterness, and placed the fragrant blossom of a geranium — taken from a plant belonging to his landlady — in the lapel of his long coat before he set out.

And yet, when he came down the Governor's broad stairs, and wandered through the big rooms, with the glare of lights above him and the shouting of the guests ringing in his ears, a sense of emptiness beset him; the crowded place seemed vacant and without meaning. Even the noise sounded hollow and remote — and why had he bothered about the geranium? He hated her and would never look at her again — but why was she not there?

By-and-by, he found himself standing against a wall, where he had been pushed by the press of people. He was wondering drearily what he

was to do with a clean plate and a napkin which a courteous negro had handed him, half-an-hour earlier, when he felt a quick jerk at his sleeve. It was Truslow, who had worked his way along the wall and who now, standing on tiptoe, spoke rapidly but cautiously, close to his ear.

"Senator, be quick," he said sharply, at the same time alert to see that they were unobserved. "Mrs. Protheroe wants to speak to you at once. You'll find her near the big palms under the stairway in the hall."

He was gone — he had wormed his way half across the room — before the other, in his simple amazement could answer. When Alonzo at last found a word, it was only a monosyllable, which, with his accompanying action, left a matron of years, who was at that moment being pressed fondly to his side, in a state of mind almost as dumbfounded as his own. "*Here!*" was all he said as he pressed the plate and napkin into her hand and departed forcibly for the hall, leaving a spectacular wreckage of trains behind him.

The upward flight of the stairway left a space underneath, upon which, as it was screened (save for a narrow entrance) by a thicket of palms, the crowd had not encroached. Here were placed a divan and a couple of chairs; there was shade from the glare of gas, and the light was dim and cool. Mrs. Protheroe had risen from the divan when Alonzo entered this grotto, and stood waiting for him.

He stopped in the green entrance-way with a quick exclamation.

She did not seem the same woman who had put such slights upon him, this tall, white vision of silk, with the summery scarf falling from her shoulders. His great wrath melted at the sight of her; the pain of his racked pride, which had been so hot in his breast, gave way to a species of fear. She seemed not a human being, but a bright spirit of beauty and goodness who stood before him, extending two fine arms to him in long, white gloves.

She left him to his trance for a moment, then seized both his hands in hers and cried to him

in her rapturous, low voice: "Ah, Senator, you have come! I *knew* you understood!"

"Yes ma'am," he whispered chokily.

She drew him to one of the chairs and sank gracefully down upon the divan near him.

"Mr. Truslow was so afraid you wouldn't," she went on rapidly, "but I was sure. You see I didn't want anybody to suspect that I had any influence with you. I didn't want them to know, even, that I'd talked to you. It all came to me after the first day that we met. You see I've believed in you, in your power and in your reserve, from the first. I want all that you do to seem to come from yourself and not from me or any one else. Oh, I *believe* in great, strong men who stand upon their own feet and conquer the world for themselves! That's *your* way, Senator Rawson. So, you see, as they think I'm lobbying for the bill, I wanted them to believe that your speech for it to-morrow comes from your own great, strong mind and heart and your sense of right, and not from any suggestion of mine."

"My speech!" he stammered.

"Oh, I know," she cried; "I know you think I don't believe much in speeches, and I don't ordinarily, but a few, simple, straightforward and vigorous words from you, to-morrow, may carry the bill through. You've made such *progress*, you've been so *reserved*, that you'll carry great weight — and there are three votes of the drains and dikes that are against us now, but will follow yours absolutely. Do you think I would have 'cut' *you* if it hadn't been *best?*"

"But I — "

"Oh, I know you didn't actually promise me to speak, that day. But I knew you would when the time came! I knew that a man of power goes over *all* obstacles, once his sense of *right* is aroused! I *knew* — I never doubted it, that once *you* felt a thing to be right you would strike for it, with all your great strength — at all costs — at all — "

"I can't — I — I — can't!" he whispered nervously. "Don't you see — don't you see — I — "

She leaned toward him, lifting her face close to

his. She was so near him that the faint odour of her hair came to him again, and once more the unfortunate Senator from Stackpole risked a meeting of his eyes with hers, and saw the light shining far down in their depths.

At this moment the shadow of a portly man who was stroking his beard the wrong way projected itself upon them from the narrow, green entrance to the grotto. Neither of them perceived it.

Senator Josephus Battle passed on, but when Alonzo Rawson emerged, a few moments later, he was pledged to utter a few simple, straightforward and vigorous words in favour of the bill. And — let the shame fall upon the head of the scribe who tells it — he had kissed Mrs. Protheroe!

The fight upon the "Sunday Baseball Bill," the next morning, was the warmest of that part of the session, though for a while the reporters were disappointed. They were waiting for Senator Battle, who was famous among them for the vituperative vigour of his attacks and for the kind

of personalities which made valuable copy. And yet, until the debate was almost over, he contented himself with going quietly up and down the aisles, whispering to the occupants of the desks, and writing and sending a multitude of notes to his colleagues. Meanwhile, the orators upon both sides harangued their fellows, the lobby, the unpolitical audience, and the patient presiding officer to no effect, so far as votes went. The general impression was that the bill would pass.

Alonzo Rawson sat, bent over his desk, his eyes fixed with gentle steadiness upon Mrs. Protheroe, who occupied the chair wherein he had first seen her. A senator of the opposition was finishing his denunciation, when she turned and nodded almost imperceptibly to the young man.

He gave her one last look of pathetic tenderness and rose.

"The Senator from Stackpole!"

"I want," Alonzo began, in his big voice: "I want to say a few simple, straightforward but

vigorous words about this bill. You may remember I spoke against it on its second reading —"

"You did *that!*" shouted Senator Battle suddenly.

"I want to say now," the Senator from Stackpole continued, "that at that time I hadn't studied the subject sufficiently. I didn't know the conditions of the case, nor the facts, but since then a great light has broke in upon me — "

"I should say it had! I saw it break!" was Senator Battle's second violent interruption.

When order was restored, Alonzo, who had become very pale, summoned his voice again. "I think we'd ought to take into consideration that Sunday is the working-man's only day of recreation and not drive him into low groggeries, but give him a chance in the open air to indulge his love of wholesome sport — "

"Such as the ancient Romans enjoyed!" interposed Battle vindictively.

"No, sir!" Alonzo wheeled upon him, stung to the quick. "Such a sport as free-born Americans and *only* free-born Americans can play in this

wide world — the American game of baseball, in which no other nation of the *Earth* is our equal!"

This was a point scored and the cheering lasted two minutes. Then the orator resumed:

"I say: 'Give the working-man a chance!' Is his life a happy one? You know it ain't! Give him his one day. *Don't* spoil it for him with your laws — he's only got one! I'm not goin' to take up any more of your time, but if there's anybody here who thinks my well-considered opinion worth following I say: '*Vote for this bill.*' It is right and virtuous and ennobling, and it ought to be passed! I say: '*Vote for it.*'"

The reporters decided that the Senator from Stackpole had "wakened things up." The gavel rapped a long time before the chamber quieted down, and when it did, Josephus Battle was on his feet and had obtained the recognition of the chair.

"I wish to say, right here," he began, with a rasping leisureliness, "that I hope no member of this honoured body will take my remarks as per-

sonal or unparliamentary — *but*" — he raised a big forefinger and shook it with menace at the presiding officer, at the same time suddenly lifting his voice to an unprintable shriek — "I say to *you*, sir, that the song of the siren has been *heard* in the land, and the call of Delilah has been answered! When the Senator from Stackpole rose in this chamber, less than three weeks ago, and denounced this iniquitous measure, I heard him with pleasure — we *all* heard him with pleasure — *and* respect! In spite of his youth and the poor quality of his expression, *we* listened to him. *We* knew he was sencere! What has caused the change in him? What *has*, I ask? I shall not tell you, upon this floor, but I've taken mighty good care to let most of you know, during the morning, either by word of mouth or by *note* of hand! Especially those of you of the drains and dikes and others who might follow this young Samson, whose locks have been shore! *I've* told you all about that, and more — *I've* told you the *inside* history of some *facts* about the bill that I will not make public, because I am too confident of our

strength to defeat this devilish measure, and prefer to let our vote speak our opinion of it! Let me not detain you longer. *I* thank you!"

Long before he had finished, the Senator from Stackpole was being held down in his chair by Truslow and several senators whose seats were adjacent; and the vote was taken amid an uproar of shouting and confusion. When the clerk managed to proclaim the result over all other noises, the bill was shown to be defeated and "killed," by a majority of five votes.

A few minutes later, Alonzo Rawson, his neckwear disordered and his face white with rage, stumbled out of the great doors upon the trail of Battle, who had quietly hurried away to his hotel for lunch as soon as he had voted.

The black automobile was vanishing round a corner. Truslow stood upon the edge of the pavement staring after it ruefully:

"Where is Mrs. Protheroe?" gasped the Senator from Stackpole.

"She's gone," said the other.

"Gone where?"

"Gone back to Paris. She sails day after to-morrow. She just had time enough to catch her train for New York after waiting to hear how the vote went. She told me to tell you good-bye, and that she was sorry. Don't stare at me Rawson! I guess we're in the same boat! — Where are you going?" he finished abruptly.

Alonzo swung by him and started across the street. "To find Battle!" the hoarse answer came back.

The conquering Josephus was leaning meditatively upon the counter of the cigar-stand of his hotel when Alonzo found him. He took one look at the latter's face and backed to the wall, tightening his grasp upon the heavy-headed ebony cane it was his habit to carry, a habit upon which he now congratulated himself.

But his precautions were needless. Alonzo stopped out of reaching distance.

"You tell me," he said in a breaking voice; "you tell me what you meant about Delilah and sirens and Samsons and inside facts! You tell me!"

"You wild ass of the prairies," said Battle, "I saw you last night behind them pa'ms! But don't you think I told it — or ever will! I just passed the word around that she'd argued you into her way of thinkin', same as she had a good many others. And as for the rest of it, I found out where the nigger in the woodpile was, and I handed that out, too. Don't you take it hard, my son, but I told you her husband left her a good deal of land around here. She owns the ground that they use for the baseball park, and her lease would be worth considerable more if they could have got the right to play on Sundays!"

Senator Trumbull sat up straight, in bed, that night, and, for the first time during his martyrdom, listened with no impatience to the prayer which fell upon his ears.

"O Lord Almighty," through the flimsy partition came the voice of Alonzo Rawson, quaveringly, but with growing strength: "Aid Thou me to see my way more clear! I find it hard to tell right from wrong, and I find myself beset with

tangled wires. O God, I feel that I am ignorant, and fall into many devices. These are strange paths wherein Thou hast set my feet, but I feel that through Thy help, and through great anguish, I am learning!"

GREAT MEN'S SONS

MME. BERNHARDT and M. Coquelin were playing "L'Aiglon." Toward the end of the second act people began to slide down in their seats, shift their elbows, or casually rub their eyes; by the close of the third, most of the taller gentlemen were sitting on the small of their backs with their knees as high as decorum permitted, and many were openly coughing; but when the fourth came to an end, active resistance ceased, hopelessness prevailed, the attitudes were those of the stricken field, and the over-crowded house was like a college chapel during an interminable compulsory lecture. Here and there — but most rarely — one saw an eager woman with bright eyes, head bent forward and body spellbound, still enchantedly following the course of the play. Between the acts the orchestra pattered ragtime and inanities from the new comic operas,

while the audience in general took some heart. When the play was over, we were all enthusiastic; though our admiration, however vehement in the words employed to express it, was somewhat subdued as to the accompanying manner, which consisted, mainly, of sighs and resigned murmurs. In the lobby a thin old man with a grizzled chin-beard dropped his hand lightly on my shoulder, and greeted me in a tone of plaintive inquiry:

"Well, son?"

Turning, I recognized a patron of my early youth, in whose woodshed I had smoked my first cigar, an old friend whom I had not seen for years; and to find him there, with his long, dust-coloured coat, his black string tie and rusty hat, brushed on every side by opera cloaks and feathers, was a rich surprise, warming the cockles of my heart. His name is Tom Martin; he lives in a small country town, where he commands the trade in Dry Goods and Men's Clothing; his speech is pitched in a high key, is very slow, sometimes whines faintly; and he always calls me "Son."

"What in the world!" I exclaimed, as we shook hands.

"Well," he drawled, "I dunno why I shouldn't be as meetropolitan as anybody. I come over on the afternoon accommodation for the show. Let's you and me make a night of it. What say, son?"

"What did you think of the play?" I asked, as we turned up the street toward the club.

"I think they done it about as well as they could."

"That all?"

"Well," he rejoined with solemnity, "there was a heap *of* it, wasn't there!"

We talked of other things, then, until such time as we found ourselves seated by a small table at the club, old Tom somewhat uneasily regarding a twisted cigar he was smoking and plainly confounded by the "carbonated" syphon, for which, indeed, he had no use in the world. We had been joined by little Fiderson, the youngest member of the club, whose whole nervous person jerkily sparkled "L'Aiglon" enthusiasm.

"Such an evening!" he cried, in his little spiky voice. "Mr. Martin, it does one good to realize that our country towns are sending representatives to us when we have such things; that they wish to get in touch with what is greatest in Art. They should do it often. To think that a journey of only seventy miles brings into your life the magnificence of Rostand's point of view made living fire by the genius of a Bernhardt and a Coquelin!"

"Yes," said Mr. Martin, with a curious helplessness, after an ensuing pause, which I refused to break, "yes, sir, they seemed to be doing it about as well as they could."

Fiderson gasped slightly. "It was magnificent! Those two great artists! But over all the play — the play! Romance new-born; poesy marching with victorious banners; a great spirit breathing! Like 'Cyrano' — the birth-mark of immortality on this work!"

There was another pause, after which old Tom turned slowly to me, and said: "Homer Tibbs's opened up a cigar-stand at the deepo.

Carries a line of candy, magazines, and fruit, too. "Home's a hustler."

Fiderson passed his hand through his hair.

"That death scene!" he exclaimed at me, giving Martin up as a log accidentally rolled in from the woods. "I thought that after 'Wagram' I could feel nothing more; emotion was exhausted; but then came that magnificent death! It was tragedy made ecstatic; pathos made into music; the grandeur of a gentle spirit, conquered physically but morally unconquerable! Goethe's 'More Light' outshone!"

Old Tom's eyes followed the smoke of his perplexing cigar along its heavy strata in the still air of the room, as he inquired if I remembered Orlando T. Bickner's boy, Mel. I had never heard of him, and said so.

"No, I expect not," rejoined Martin. "Prob'ly you wouldn't; Bickner was Governor along in *my* early days, and I reckon he ain't hardly more than jest a name to you two. But *we* kind of thought he was the biggest man this country had ever seen, or was goin' to see, and he *was* a big

man. He made one president, and could have been it himself, instead, if he'd be'n willing to do a kind of underhand trick, but I expect without it he was about as big a man as anybody'd care to be; Governor, Senator, Secretary of State — and just owned his party! And, my law! — the whole earth bowin' down to him; torchlight processions and sky-rockets when he come home in the night; bands and cannon if his train got in, daytime; home-folks so proud of him they couldn't see; everybody's hat off; and all the most important men in the country following at his heels — a country, too, that'd put up consider'ble of a comparison with everything Napoleon had when he'd licked 'em all, over there.

"Of course he had enemies, and, of course, year by year, they got to be more of 'em, and they finally downed him for good; and like other public men so fixed, he didn't live long after that. He had a son, Melville, mighty likable young fellow, studyin' law when his paw died. I was livin' in their town then, and I knowed Mel

Bickner pretty well; he was consider'ble of a man.

"I don't know as I ever heard him speak of that's bein' the reason, but I expect it may've be'n partly in the hope of carryin' out some of his paw's notions, Mel tried hard to git into politics; but the old man's local enemies jumped on every move he made, and his friends wouldn't help any; you can't tell why, except that it generally *is* thataway. Folks always like to laugh at a great man's son and say *he* can't amount to anything. Of course that comes partly from fellows like that ornery little cuss we saw to-night, thinkin' they're a good deal because somebody else done something, and the somebody else happened to be their paw; and the women run after 'em, and they git low-down like he was, and so on."

"Mr. Martin," interrupted Fiderson, with indignation, "will you kindly inform me in what way 'L'Aiglon' was 'low-down'?"

"Well, sir, didn't that huntin'-lodge appointment kind of put you in mind of a camp-meetin'

scandal?" returned old Tom quietly. "It did me."

"But —"

"Well, sir, I can't say as I understood the French of it, but I read the book in English before I come up, and it seemed to me he was pretty much of a low-down boy; yet I wanted to see how they'd make him out; hearin' it was thought, the country over, to be such a great *play;* though to tell the truth all I could tell about *that* was that every line seemed to end in 'awze' ; and 't they all talked in rhyme, and it did strike me as kind of enervatin' to be expected to believe that people could keep it up that long; and that it wasn't only the boy that never quit on the subject of himself and his folks, but pretty near any of 'em, if he'd git the chanst, did the same thing, so't almost I sort of wondered if Rostand wasn't that kind."

"Go on with Melville Bickner," said I.

"What do you expect," retorted Mr. Martin with a vindictive gleam in his eye, "when you give a man one of these here spiral staircase

cigars? Old Peter himself couldn't keep straight along one subject if he tackled a cigar like this. Well, sir, I always thought Mel had a mighty mean time of it. He had to take care of his mother and two sisters, his little brother and an aunt that lived with them; and there was mighty little to do it on; big men don't usually leave much but debts, and in this country, of course, a man can't eat and spend long on his paw's reputation, like that little Dook of Reishtod —"

"I beg to tell you, Mr. Martin —" Fiderson began hotly.

Martin waved his bony hand soothingly.

"Oh, I know; they was money in his mother's family, and they give him his vittles and clothes, and plenty, too. *His* paw didn't leave much either — though he'd stole more than Boss Tweed. I suppose — and, just lookin' at things from the point of what they'd *earned*, his maw's folks had stole a good deal, too; or else you can say they were a kind of public charity; old Metternich, by what I can learn, bein' the only one in the whole possetucky of 'em that really *did*

anything to deserve his salary —" Mr. Martin broke off suddenly, observing that I was about to speak, and continued:

"Mel didn't git much law practice, jest about enough to keep the house goin' and pay taxes. He kept workin' for the party jest the same and jest as cheerfully as if it didn't turn him down hard every time he tried to git anything for himself. They lived some ways out from town; and he sold the horses to keep the little brother in school, one winter, and used to walk in to his office and out again, twice a day, over the worst roads in the State, rain or shine, snow, sleet, or wind, without any overcoat; and he got kind of a skimpy, froze-up look to him that lasted clean through summer. He worked like a mule, that boy did, jest barely makin' ends meet. He had to quit runnin' with the girls and goin' to parties and everything like that; and I expect it may have been some hard to do; for if they ever *was* a boy loved to dance and be gay, and up to anything in the line of fun and junketin' round, it was Mel Bickner. He had a laugh

I can hear yet — made you feel friendly to everybody you saw; feel like stoppin' the next man you met and shakin' hands and havin' a joke with him.

"Mel was engaged to Jane Grandis when Governor Bickner died. He had to go and tell her to take somebody else — it was the only thing to do. He couldn't give Jane anything but his poverty, and she wasn't used to it. They say she offered to come to him anyway, but he wouldn't hear of it, and no more would he let her wait for him; told her she mustn't grow into an old maid, lonely, and still waitin' for the lightning to strike him — that is, his luck to come; and actually advised her to take 'Gene Callender, who'd be'n pressin' pretty close to Mel for her before the engagement. The boy didn't talk to her this way with tears in his eyes and mourning and groaning. No, sir! It was done *cheerful;* and so much so that Jane never *was* quite sure after-*werds* whether Mel wasn't kind of glad to git rid of her or not. Fact is, they say she quit speakin' to him. Mel *knowed;* a state of puzzlement or

even a good *mad's* a mighty sight better than bein' all harrowed up and grief-stricken. And he never give her — nor any one else — a chanst to be sorry for him. His maw was the only one heard him walk the floor nights, and after he found out she could hear him he walked in his socks.

"Yes, sir! Meet that boy on the street, or go up in his office, you'd think that he was the gayest feller in town. I tell you there wasn't anything pathetic about Mel Bickner! He didn't believe in it. And at home he had a funny story every evening of the world, about something 'd happened during the day; and 'd whistle to the guitar, or git his maw into a game of cards with his aunt and the girls. Law! that boy didn't believe in no house of mourning. He'd be up at four in the morning, hoein' up their old garden; raised garden-truck for their table, sparrow-grass and sweet corn — yes, and roses, too; always had the house full of roses in June-time; never *was* a house sweeter-smellin' to go into.

"Mel was what I call a useful citizen. As I said, I knowed him well. I don't recollect I ever

heard him speak of himself, nor yet of his father but once — for *that*, I reckon, he jest couldn't; and for himself; I don't believe it ever occurred to him.

"And he was a *smart* boy. Now, you take it, all in all, a boy can't be as smart as Mel was, and work as hard as he did, and not *git* somewhere — in this State, anyway! And so, about the fifth year, things took a sudden change for him; his father's enemies and his own friends, both, had to jest about own they was beat. The crowd that had been running the conventions and keepin' their own men in all the offices, had got to be pretty unpopular, and they had the sense to see that they'd have to branch out and connect up with some mighty good men, jest to keep the party in power. Well, sir, Mel had got to be about the most popular and respected man in the county. Then one day I met him on the street; he was on his way to buy an overcoat, and he was lookin' skimpier and more froze-up and genialer than ever. It was March, and up to jest that time things had be'n hardest of all for Mel. I

walked around to the store with him, and he was mighty happy; goin' to send his mother north in the summer, and the girls were goin' to have a party, and Bob, his little brother, could go to the best school in the country in the fall. Things had come his way at last, and that very morning the crowd had called him in and told him they were goin' to run him for county clerk.

"Well, sir, the next evening I heard Mel was sick. Seein' him only the day before on the street, out and well, I didn't think anything of it — thought prob'ly a cold or something like that; but in the morning I heard the doctor said he was likely to die. Of course I couldn't hardly believe it; thing like that never *does* seem possible, but they all said it was true, and there wasn't anybody on the street that day that didn't look blue or talked about anything else. Nobody seemed to know what was the matter with him exactly, and I reckon the doctor did jest the wrong thing for it. Near as I can make out, it was what they call appendicitis nowadays, and had come on him in the night.

"Along in the afternoon I went out there to see if there was anything I could do. You know what a house in that condition is like. Old Fes Bainbridge, who was some sort of a relation, and me sat on the stairs together outside Mel's room. We could hear his voice, clear and strong and hearty as ever. He was out of pain; and he had to die with the full flush of health and strength on him, and he knowed it. Not *wantin'* to go, through the waste and wear of a long sickness, but with all the ties of life clinchin' him here, and success jest comin.' We heard him speak of us, amongst others, old Fes and me; wanted 'em to be sure not forget to tell me to remember to vote for Fillmore if the ground-hog saw his shadow election year, which was an old joke I always had with him. He was awful worried about his mother, though he tried not to show it, and when the minister wanted to pray fer him, we heard him say, 'No, sir, you pray fer my mamma!' That was the only thing that was different from his usual way of speakin'; he called his mother 'mamma,' and he wouldn't let 'em pray

for him neither; not once; all the time he could spare for their prayin' was put in for her.

"He called in old Fes to tell him all about his life insurance. He'd carried a heavy load of it, and it was all paid up; and the sweat it must have took to do it you'd hardly like to think about. He give directions about everything as careful and painstaking as any day of his life. He asked to speak to Fes alone a minute, and later I helped Fes do what he told him. 'Cousin Fes,' he says, 'it's bad weather, but I expect mother'll want all the flowers taken out to the cemetery and you better let her have her way. But there wouldn't be any good of their stayin' there; snowed on, like as not. I wish you'd wait till after she's come away, and git a wagon and take 'em in to the hospital. You can fix up the anchors and so forth so they won't look like funeral flowers.'

"About an hour later his mother broke out with a scream, sobbin' and cryin', and he tried to quiet her by tellin' over one of their old-time family funny stories; it made her worse, so he quit.

'Oh, Mel,' she says, 'you'll be with your father —'

"I don't know as Mel had much of a belief in a hereafter; certainly he wasn't a great churchgoer. 'Well,' he says, mighty slow, but hearty and smiling, too, 'if I see father, I — guess — I'll — be — pretty — well — fixed!' Then he jest lay still, tryin' to quiet her and pettin' her head. And so — that's the way he went."

Fiderson made one of his impatient little gestures, but Mr. Martin drowned his first words with a loud fit of coughing.

"Well, sir," he observed, "I read that 'Leglong' book down home; and I heard two or three countries, and especially ourn, had gone middling crazy over it; it seemed kind of funny that *we* should, too, so I thought I better come up and see it for myself, how it *was*, on the stage, where you could *look* at it; and — I expect they done it as well as they could. But when that little boy, that'd always had his board and clothes and education free, saw that he'd jest about talked himself to death, and called for the press notices

about his christening to be read to him to soothe his last spasms — why, I wasn't overly put in mind of Melville Bickner."

Mr. Martin's train left for Plattsville at two in the morning. Little Fiderson and I escorted him to the station. As the old fellow waved us good-bye from within the gates, Fiderson turned and said:

"Just the type of sodden-headed old pioneer that you couldn't hope to make understand a beautiful thing like 'L'Aiglon' in a thousand years. I thought it better not to try, didn't you?"

THE END

THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, N. Y.